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THE SERPENT OF EL PASO; Or, FRONTIER FRANK, THE SCOUT of the RIO GRANDE.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE LONE STAR GAMBLER," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CARSON," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," ETC., ETC.



THE VENGEFUL CABALLERO SPRUNG BACK AGHAST AT HIS DASTARDLY DEED.

The Serpent of El Paso;

OR,

FRONTIER FRANK,

THE SCOUT of the RIO GRANDE.

"BY BUCKSKIN SAM"

(MAJOR SAM S. HALL),

AUTHOR OF "THE BRAZOS TIGERS," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," "KIT CARSON, JR.," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BIG BLOW-OUT.

It was a gala day in El Paso, Texas; or, at least, it was the night following the grand *fiesta*, cock-fights and bull-fights, all of which had either furnished or been mingled with an extravagant carnival of gayety, interspersed now and then with desperate encounters between the Texans from Franklin, on the opposite side of the Rio Grande, and the Mexicans, which had proved fatal to many on both sides, although about twice as many of the latter had been forced to "turn up toes" as of the Americans, or "Gringos," as we are termed on the Rio Grande border.

The inevitable fandangos, which always follow such a day, were in full blast about the town, which, at the time of which we write, consisted of about five thousand inhabitants, the settlement being scattered up and down a valley some nine miles in length, which extends all along the Rio Grande, and parallel with it, the river passing through a gorge or gap in the mountains above the town—hence its name, El Paso del Norte, or the Pass of the North.

El Paso is noted for what is known as Pass wine and Pass brandy, and also for Pass onions, which latter are transported for seven hundred miles and more to market, in *carretas* or ox carts, and are nearly as large as flat pumpkins.

Our story draws us to the most extensive and fashionable fandango, or *danza*, which is really beyond the power of pen to describe; nevertheless, in our feeble way, we will attempt it.

A large *jacal* in the central part of the town, and just north of the Main Plaza, on a street running parallel with the north side of the square, and which had been erected for dancing purposes, had been leased for this particular night by two officers of the army—Colonel Dioncio Cardenas and Capitan Miguel Martinez—and this made the affair somewhat a private one, although no such thing as private *danzas* were really recognized on such a *fiesta* day as that of which we write.

The building was, as has been mentioned, what is known as a *jacal*, which is built of poles some five inches in diameter, such as are used in constructing a corral, and are set in the earth to the depth of three feet in the same manner. In this way the sides and ends are formed, with openings which are sawed out for doors, there being seldom or never any windows. At the ends the poles gradually lengthen upward, forming a peak, the central one at each end being forked at the top, over which a long ridge-pole is laid, and smaller ones from this to the side are bound tightly with strips of rawhide. Thick layers of river reeds, lapping shingle-like, one over the other, form a close, waterproof roof. The floor is clay, beaten hard, smooth and level, and allowed to bake with the heat before being trodden upon. In this simple way is a fandango house constructed, there being a small raised platform at one end for the musicians, and, generally speaking, a table or two near the entrance, on which coffee and *vino dulce*, or sweet wine, are vended; while, at either side of the fiddlers, the inevitable game of *monte* is dealt.

Strange as it may seem to the reader, it is seldom that a man is seen escorting a woman or girl to one of these entertainments; the females going by themselves, either singly or by twos and threes, and congregating for gossip previous to the advent of the males. Often the *danza* commences upon the arrival of the first *caballero*, who at once selects his partner, and begins to whirl about the floor in one of the beautiful dreamy waltzes of Mexico, which gradually changes to a top-like whirl, causing the beholder to become dizzy, and to expect at any moment the collapse of those engaged in it.

It was nine o'clock on the night in question, when in the streets leading to the fandango *casa*, the bright moonlight disclosed the form of many a beautiful senorita, with their bright colored *rebozos*, or head-dresses, white bodices, and long, flowing scarlet sashes; and soon the benches along the sides of the *casa* were filled with the dark-eyed beauties of the land of the Montezumas.

Take the daughter of the poorest peon in Mexico, and dress her in costly robes, and then introduce her among the choicest ball-room beauties of the Empire City, and she will carry herself with as much grace, and demean herself as though the position and the company were common to her.

Ten minutes perhaps had elapsed, when Colonel Cardenas and Capitan Martinez entered

the *casa*, attired in the gorgeous uniforms of the Mexican army, glittering with gold lace. They were close followed by a party of Castilian *caballeros*, and then the dance began, presenting a variety of features very pleasing to the eye.

In the whirl of the waltz, a plain, dark, nun-like robe would be followed by one of pink satin and gauze; next, a bodice of scarlet velvet, with gold buttons set thickly in front, then a richly-figured brocade, or white muslin, profusely decorated with pink ribbons, as was also the long braids of night black hair.

Between the first and second dances, all within the building were electrified by the entrance of a most lovely American girl, who could not have been more than sixteen years of age. She was indeed most beautiful, with fair complexion, rosy cheeks, ruby lips, and pearl-like teeth, which last were revealed in a bewitching smile, as Capitan Martinez stepped quickly forward and tendered his arm. This was at once accepted, and the two promenaded the floor for a time while all seemed to wait for them to head the next dance. The new-comer was slender in stature, with hazel eyes, and a wealth of dark brown wavy hair, which was most tastily arranged. Her attire was a pink-figured, tight-fitting basque, a long skirt of some fine gauze India fabric, and a set of pearls about her swan-like neck; while a pink sash, with intricate vine-work in gold, hung loosely down her left side, and tied in a square knot, in the center of which was a five-pointed gold star, the symbol of Texas.

"Mira!" (look) exclaimed one of the *caballeros*, touching the arm of Colonel Cardenas as he spoke; "quen es?"

"I do not know who she is," was the reply. "Hold!" snapping his fingers—"I have it! She is the daughter of an American army officer, who has been disgraced and cashiered at Fort Davis recently. He is now at Franklin, I believe, and drinking himself to death, as fast as he can. We were invited over last week, and I met the father, but did not get an introduction to the young beauty herself. Martinez was more lucky, and it seems has invited her to this *danza*. Her mother is dead, and, like most American ladies, she cares not for the proprieties very much. She rides like an English woman, is reckless and independent, and just the girl to capture *El Capitan*, did she have the doubloons to back her beauty."

"That ought not to influence Martinez, coronel; for he is, or will be, immensely rich."

"Well," shrugging his shoulders in true Spanish style; "I cannot say positively, but I think when Capitan Martinez marries, his wife must add some considerable to his *pesos*. *Carajo!* It is Satan's own luck that he should have met this beauty. He is a devil among the women, and I'll lay a dozen doubloons against one that she will curse the day her hand ever clasped his in friendship. But come, Valdez, let us get an introduction, and then—on with the dance! I have a partner engaged already."

"Bueno, Senor Coronel!" agreed Valdez; and the two passed on to intercept the subject of their conversation, when the wished-for introduction took place.

"Colonel Cardenas," said Martinez, with a low bow in salutation; "Allow me to give you the honor of the acquaintance of Senorita Elizabeth Ellsworth, the daughter of an American soldier."

"I am exceedingly gratified and pleased to know Senorita Ellsworth," said the coronel, with a low, graceful bow; "and I trust that she will enjoy herself on many occasions, this side of the Rio Bravo."

"Mil gracias!" acknowledged the young lady, briefly.

"Senor Valdez, Senorita Ellsworth," continued Martinez.

Valdez bowed lowly, the dazzling smile of the fair girl before him rendering him speechless for the time.

At this moment the music struck up, and the dance went on; the coronel and Miss Ellsworth leading, and commanding, by their graceful movements, the attention of all. They were a well-matched pair indeed. This was the verdict of all; and that, without there seeming to be one iota of jealousy on the part of the beautiful Mexican girls present.

During the dance, there sauntered into the apartment a young man of commanding physique, who made his way the entire length of the room, between the dancers and the "wall-flowers," carelessly leaned against the end of the building, folded his arms, and, looking around the room, rested his eyes on the main entrance, in evident expectancy.

That he was an American, was evident to the most casual observer; and a splendid specimen of a one at that. Not over two and twenty years of age, at least six feet in height, and clad in the fancy buckskin leggings and *jaqueta* of the Rio Grande, embroidered and buttoned profusely, with the inevitable Colt's revolvers and bowie-knife hanging from embossed scabbards, which last were attached to a beautifully stamped belt, held in place by an engraved clasp in front. Long black-brown hair, dark eyes that were piercing in their glances, and a

frank handsome face, made him as noticeable a figure as had been Miss Ellsworth, and the eyes of the senoritas were fastened upon him with melting glances, that seemed to invite speech.

However, the young man had evidently come with an object, and this was very soon apparent; for, close after him, followed a motley crowd of drunken men, who with loud curses and ribald songs, entered reeling into the room, causing the dancers to retreat toward the platform of the musicians.

"*Caspita!*" exclaimed Colonel Cardenas.

"*Demonios Gringos!*" muttered Capitan Martinez, his face turning ghastly white in his just rage.

Miss Ellsworth clung to his arm in terror, although she recognized her own countrymen.

They were indeed a hard crowd, that threatened to "go through their slam-up fandango," all being white desperadoes of the border, from the American side of the river, but who had probably run no small number of cattle and horses to the Mexican side, where, after disposing of them, they had stolen Mexican stock to drive back. This was the sort of crowd they seemed, and their hatred of the Mexican officers, expressed as it was by word and look, was almost conclusive proof of this; as they had doubtless lost some of their number, from coming in contact with the Mexican troops, who had probably been instrumental in breaking up some of their many raids.

"I'm a high-fly, corn-fed confiscator!" yelled the leader; "an' kin chaw up any long or short-legged Greaser what w'ars soldjer tricks. We're a paralyzin' crowd, an' lows ter run this she-bang. We're on a hooraw, gals; an' we tends ter shake cow-hides with yer, arter we hes shot ther brass buttons offen them Greaser galoots!"

"Stand off, there!" yelled Colonel Cardenas.

"Stand off, or I'll alarm the town!"

"Shet up yer *chile-trap!*"

"Civerlize ther yaller bellies!"

"Hold yer gab! Yer can't soar higher'n a bob-tailed buzzard!"

"I'm a lightnin'-bug, an' flash offen, yer bet!"

"Speel out yer grand combernation fireworks!"

"Who's a-bossin' this hyer picnic?"

These were the cries that filled the air as the mob reeled back and forth against each other.

The females, who had been dancing, all rushed to one side among their companions, the "wall-flowers," all except Miss Ellsworth, who seemed too much alarmed to know what to do.

"Steady, boyees!" yelled the ruffian leader of the mob.

A scattering volley brought both officers to the floor, and also the beautiful American girl; but at this moment the young man who had just before entered and taken up his position next the music-stand, sprung forward, with a revolver at full cock in each hand, and delivered in quick succession a half-dozen shots, dropping as many of the outlaws. Then, yelling in a stern voice, clear as a bell:

"Leave the *jacal*, cowards, or die in your boots!"

Again his revolvers cracked, and the last survivor of the desperado crew fell a corpse across the threshold.

Without paying the least attention to the others, the youth caught up Miss Ellsworth and rushed out into the night, followed by a simultaneous cry:

"*Gracias, Salvador mio!*"

CHAPTER II.

A DASTARD'S DEED.

WHEN Elizabeth Ellsworth, while dancing with Capitan Martinez, saw the young American saunter into the fandango and take up his position near the musicians as a spectator, she came near fainting, for she recognized him as Frontier Frank, a scout, who frequently brought dispatches to the commandant at Fort Davis, where her father had been stationed.

Previous to the disgrace and dismissal from the service of the latter, of which the reader has been informed, the young scout had been in the habit of throwing himself in the way of Miss Ellsworth, and had at one time confessed his love for her.

She had refused to marry him, although when too late she found, to her sorrow, that she loved him; and had he repeated his offer she would gladly have accepted him and given him her whole heart. He had, however, held himself aloof and finally disappeared. Report said that he had been killed by Apaches, and she had mourned most sincerely in consequence; in fact, his handsome face and manly form haunted her, and when misfortune overwhelmed her and her only surviving parent took to drink to such an extent that she was powerless to influence him, she regretted that she had not such a protector as she knew in her heart of hearts Frontier Frank would have been. It was the old story—"it might have been"—a sad, sad story always.

Elizabeth had been under influences in garri-son life that caused her to be somewhat skeptical in regard to the professed love of men; but as she recalled each word and act, and the manner of the young scout, she felt sure that he

was a man among men, and that she had made the great mistake of her life.

Since living in Franklin, she had felt greatly disgraced and discouraged by the conduct of her father, and she felt that he would soon squander what little they had of this world's goods, and when this should be the case, she was at a loss to know what she could then do for a livelihood.

She would be helpless and alone, penniless on that wild border, when her father should die—an event which must soon occur—and the contemplation of such a prospect caused her to become almost desperate. Therefore it was that, when at a ball in Franklin, she had met and been introduced to Capitan Martinez, of the Mexican Army, and had realized that she had created a favorable impression upon him, she resolved to follow it up, believing him to be a gentleman of wealth and a man of honor. This resolution, be it remembered, was not formed from any motives more selfish than those which generally actuate all who are so unpleasantly situated.

She had herself informed Senor Martinez of her father's disgrace, well knowing that sooner or later he would become acquainted with the facts. Situated as she was, it was not strange that she should form some such plans as this, and use many of the arts known to her sex to captivate such a desirable husband.

Had she known that Frontier Frank still lived, such an alliance would never have been thought of, and she would have toiled for her bread, sustained by the hope of his return. So it was, however, that when Capitan Martinez sent her an invitation to the *danza*, stating that he would himself cross the river and act as her escort, she had written to the effect that he need not trouble himself to that extent, as a lady friend would, upon *fiesta* night, cross to El Paso to visit some friends, and she would accompany her.

This she had done to prevent gossip, and also to prevent the Mexican officer from meeting her father in an intoxicated condition, as the latter had been upon a terrible spree.

She had, therefore, in company with the wife of an officer from Fort Davis, crossed the Rio Grande and gone to the house at which her friend intended stopping for the night; there she had dressed for the *danza*, little dreaming that there would be any interruption to the night's enjoyment, and intending to leave at an early hour to pass the better part of the night with her friend and return to Franklin with the latter the ensuing morning. But events, as we have seen, were ordered differently.

When she first saw Frontier Frank, as has been said, she came near fainting, such a storm of thought rushed upon her brain.

Frank was alive! That was the most joyous knowledge she could have become possessed of; but would he not now be fettered from further pressing his suit, after meeting her under such circumstances? He had grown handsomer, and nobler in appearance during his absence—this she saw at a glance, and was forced to acknowledge that he was far superior to any man whom she knew, not excepting Capitan Martinez.

The question that arose in her mind and perplexed her greatly was, would not Frank be offended with her for having crossed the river without an American male escort, and more so for being at the *danza* under the protection of a Mexican officer? These were facts which he would most certainly find out. She felt herself in a most painful and embarrassing position, and when first she saw that her life might be in danger, she knew that had she not clung to the arm of Capitan Martinez, in her fright, Frank would at once have rushed to her protection.

When the crowd of desperadoes ran toward her, and the flash of steel and shots of revolvers blinded her eyes, she gave up all hope of life; and on the instant that she perceived the man to whom she was clinging to have been shot, her senses left her, and they fell upon the blood-stained floor of the *caja* together.

It was not more than two minutes after Frontier Frank had left the *danza* hall—the groans of wounded men and the cries of frightened women now filling it—when Capitan Martinez crawled out from the mixed mass of humanity, living and dead, being observed by but few, and hastily left the scene of confusion.

Once outside he rose erect—having, in truth, not been wounded, but only thrown himself upon the ground to avoid being hurt—and, his teeth set and his eyes blazing with jealous fury, he stood pale with passion for a moment, for he had from his recumbent position observed the gallant conduct of the American scout and his departure with Miss Ellsworth in his arms.

Never before had the Mexican officer met a maiden who had so infatuated him by her intoxicating beauty and winning ways, and he had sworn by all the gods of Montezuma that she should be his at all hazards.

But only for a moment did he stand thus, with the brand of passion upon his features; then he darted, like a madman, down a side street toward the Rio Grande.

Frontier Frank, with the form of Elizabeth clasped to his breast as if all he cared for upon earth was within his embrace, and there were

foes upon every side seeking to tear her from him, rushed toward the Bravo del Norte with the intention of returning the maiden to her father, on the American side.

By the most unfrequented streets, causing those whom he met to fly with a scared look, on he went until he reached the very bank of the river, but a little distance above the ford and rope-ferry.

There he laid his lovely burden upon the sward, within the friendly screen of a clump of bushes, for he was exhausted with the fight and his long run.

Returning his bowie to its sheath, Frank removed his sombrero, the cool breeze from beyond the river blowing his long wavy hair back from his brow, while from his lips burst forth a single expression—"Thank God!"

Then, after a short pause, he continued:

"Yes, thank God that I have been permitted to save you, Lizzie Ellsworth, from the power of a villain of the deepest dye! Heavens! When I think of what has been crazing my brain for the last two hours, since I learned you were in El Paso, and in company with Capitan Martinez—when I think of the terrible torture I have suffered, I wonder that my skull did not burst! Thank God! I have been in time. You are yet uncontaminated by The Serpent of El Paso. I will save you—Heaven sent me to do it! You are dearer to me than life. You refused my love at Fort Davis, when the world was bright for you. Will you refuse Frontier Frank now, when you so sadly need a strong arm to protect you? If you do, the Apaches of Wild Rose Pass shall find a ready victim, though their dying yells shall sound at every flitting breath of mine. I must kiss you, Lizzie, for the first time, while you know nothing of it—I will steal the prize for which I would barter life gladly."

As he spoke Frontier Frank bent down over the white forehead of the young girl, but the same instant a mocking laugh broke upon his ear, and he sprang erect, with his revolver presented—sprung, alas! too late; for, as his form straightened, the sharp crack of a pistol broke upon the night air, and he fell backward to the earth, apparently dead.

On the same instant Capitan Martinez, with an oath of exultation, rushed into the thicket, grasped the limp form of Lizzie Ellsworth, and ran like a deer toward the town, and before another sun gilded the rippling waters of the Rio Grande, the hapless maiden had no desire to cross the same, but rather to plunge forever into its depths, for the Serpent of El Paso, as he had been well named, had kept his vow! In a *casa*, rented by himself and furnished luxuriantly, the infamous fiend had administered such drugs as to render the poor girl an easy victim.

We will not attempt to describe the terrible anguish of her awakening to a sense of her condition, to which death would have been far preferable—indeed she would have rushed to her death in the river, had she not been confined beyond the possibility of escape. Within a week after her abduction, during which she did not once see the author of her misery, an old Mexican woman, a friend to the hag who had her in charge, and who kept close watch upon her, came to her iron-barred window, and Lizzie sought conversation with her.

From this woman she learned that her father was dead, and that she had been saved and carried away from the *danza* by the American scout, Frontier Frank. This intelligence filled her cup of sorrow, anguish and misery to overflowing.

The death of her father was not unexpected; but, when the blow fell, the poor girl would gladly have laid herself in the grave by his side—lonely, wretched, and disgraced as she was.

After the departure of her informant, she walked the floor of her prison, with staring eyes and fingers clutched convulsively in her hair. When she fully realized that she had been in the arms of the only man whom she had ever loved upon earth, who had risked his life to save her—when she knew that she had been on the verge of heavenly bliss, and had been hurled the same hour into the very deepest and most hopeless despair, the poor girl shrieked aloud in her wild agony, tore her hair, cursing the world and all within it, except the man whom she now loved with an insane intensity, but who was lost to her forever.

Suddenly she stopped in her mad pace, for a thought flashed into her disordered mind—a thought that made the hot blood in her veins congeal with horror; and that thought was of the young scout, Frontier Frank.

If it were he who had saved her, how came she in the power of Miguel Martinez?

There was but one solution of the question. She knew that the brave scout, the hero of a hundred deadly encounters with the fierce Apaches, and the savior of scores of lives, would never have given her up while his own life was left to him. This conclusion she came to on the instant. It shot into and tore through her brain like a bullet from a rifle!

Capitan Martinez, the dastard, the fiend who had been sent from the lower regions to curse

the earth, had murdered Frontier Frank, her preserver, and then accomplished her ruin.

As the probability of this flashed through her mind, Lizzie Ellsworth gave a piercing shriek, and fell senseless upon the floor of her prison room!

CHAPTER III.

THE LAKE RANCH.

In the northern portion of the State of Chihuahua, Mexico, due west from Fort Quitman, which latter is in the State of Texas, on the bank of the Rio Grande, is a most beautiful sheet of water, known as Laguna de los Patos, which empties into Rio Carmen a stream which finds its course in the heights of the Sierra Madre.

The Laguna, is bordered with vast cottonwoods and oaks, which, with a sprinkling of walnuts make up the timber bottom toward the plains that surround it on every side. Beyond the border of trees is a guard of cacti, while, like soldiers on post, stands here and there a thrifty palmilla, varied with the Spanish bayonet, and other plants of the same family, their sharp-pointed, bristling leaves warning off, in signs louder than words, all approach.

Rich, rank, luxuriant, and of Nature's deepest green is everything that grows in the vicinity of Laguna de los Patos, and not less so in the border lands of Rio Carmen; while the prairies that stretch to the horizon line at all points of the compass, are covered with a carpet of rank grass, bespangled with flowers. Herds of cattle, horses and mules, are on all sides; while flocks of sheep and goats are nearer the timber and watched by herders.

Now and then a *vaquero* is seen to spring from the grass, where he has been taking a short *siesta*, draw upon the lariat of his feeding mustang, vault into his saddle, and hasten to head off his particular herd to prevent their being mingled with others.

All this implies a settlement of no small size near at hand; and such there is, gentle reader, although no dwellings are in view from the west side of the Laguna.

On the east, at the point where the Rio Carmen mingles its mountain current with the Laguna de los Patos, stands a large hacienda, which is located on the edge of the timber, while above, on the line of the timber, is a long line of *jacals*, the thatched huts of the lower order in Mexico. Directly in the midst of these huts are several corrals, which open toward the plain; the river, on the other side, enabling the animals, when confined, to find ready drink, the deep river being a secure barrier, except from famished stock, or in case of some very violent cause of stampede from the front.

The *casa* of the proprietor is but one story in height, built of adobe; but it covers a large space of ground, and has extensive outbuildings, surrounded by a high wall, on the top of which grows a continuous line of prickly pears, most efficient sentinels.

There is an extensive inner *patio*, or courtyard, formed by the *casa* itself, the latter being built to form three sides of a hollow square; this also is of sun-baked clay, and is hard enough to resist the hoofs of prancing mustangs. The river, in the rear of the hacienda, affords good protection in that quarter; and, as approach can only be made from the north, along the *laguna* shore within the timber without being observed—and that only on a dark night—this point, too, is well guarded; thus the establishment may well be considered a very secure fortress.

And well it needed to be at the time of which we write, a score of years ago; ay, and at the present time as well, for the wild Apache hordes and bandits dashed over Chihuahua from north to south at will, carrying devastation and death before them, and stealing the fairest flowers of Mexico to bear away to their mountain fastnesses.

Not only were those who dwelt in the State of Chihuahua subject to frequent attacks from the Apaches of the Sierra Madre, in their own territory, but from the more warlike and better armed branches of that tribe north of the Rio Grande, and also from the Comanches of the latter quarter.

The hacienda, which we have attempted to describe, was owned by Don Miguel Martinez; many thousand acres of land, many thousands of live stock, and as many as two hundred peons belonging to the estate which Don Miguel, who was a Castilian, had inherited from his father, at this time some years deceased.

Don Miguel was fifty years of age, and a widower; but he had a daughter of sixteen summers, who was the joy of his life.

Marietta Martinez, as this young lady was named, was one of the most beautiful of Mexico's daughters, and this is saying a great deal, as every one who has been in the land of the Montezumas can testify. She was a brilliant brunette, with hair black as the raven's wing, and which, when unconfined, fell in graceful waves below her waist.

Her eyes were a changeable black, which, when filled with joyousness, were most lovable in expression; but, when flashing with anger, shot out most scorching glances that showed a

daring and a bravery far beyond the average of her sex.

Her long lashes drooped over her fair, rosy cheeks, that showed a health born of exercise on the free wide prairies. A Grecian nose, a chin well rounded, and small, well-formed ears; a form as faultless as could be found upon earth—these were joined to a motion and grace that were simply fawn-like.

It was an unusual thing in families of her rank, but Marietta was free and independent, and her word was law with the old Don, whom she ruled with all the power a loved daughter can wield.

However, she had been willing to compromise to a certain extent, and had agreed to the companionship of an unfortunate relative, Celesta Carasco, who was her constant attendant, and who was as beautiful as a summer dream, a far different order of beauty, however, from that of her queen-like cousin, her mother having been an American and her father of much fairer complexion than is usually seen among those of his race.

Celesta was of petite form, with an abundance of curly golden hair and a skin that rivaled the bud of a bursting blush rose. Her form was well-rounded and graceful, but she was far from being as dashing as her cousin, inclining rather to be diffident and retiring, shunning, rather than courting, attention. They were a pair of beauties who drew the young *caballeros* from far and near upon fiesta days, and both of them were sought by many titled and gifted youths in marriage.

In the *danzas* they were the acknowledged queens, even when Don Miguel favored them with a *jornada* to the City of Chihuahua; which, however, was attended by not a little danger, as Apache war-parties were liable to be met at any time and place.

But Don Miguel Martinez was an old soldier, of the *regime* of Santa Ana, and had his peons well disciplined; although the cry of "Los Apaches!" or "Los Comanches!" would cause the yellow cheeks of the *vaqueros* to become ghastly, and they would tremble in their saddles, or on their raw-hide beds.

The war-cry of a party of Apaches invariably paralyzes the male portion of a Mexican village, and either causes them to run like cowards, and desert their women and children, or renders them incapable of successfully resisting the merciless red-man, who comes with the rush of a tornado, does his cruel work of rapine and murder, and is gone as he came, with the exception that he leaves loaded with booty and beauty.

To the south of Laguna de los Patos, situated on the bank of the Rio Carmen, was the town of Carzal; and, from this place, two accomplished young Castilians came quite often to Rancho del Laguna, as the hacienda of Don Miguel was called—both of them suitors for the hand of Marietta Martinez. Doubtless one of these would have turned his attention to Celesta Carasco, had the latter been possessed of a fortune; but, being penniless and dependent, she was freed from the attention which her beauty merited, as well as her worth.

The names of these *caballeros* were Pedro Mercedo and Francisco Martino; the former being a most unscrupulous villain, willing and even eager to stoop to any crime that would not endanger his own coward carcass, that he might further his aims, while the latter was just the opposite in character and brave as a lion. However, when our narrative commences, there had been no occasion to bring forward and reveal the character of either of them to Marietta, and both father and daughter were as well disposed toward the one as the other.

The old Don was very hospitable, and kept open house for all who came; his cellars being well stocked with imported as well as native wines and liquors, which were freely distributed to both guest and peon on *fiesta* days.

Neither Pedro nor Francisco had any cause to think that they were advancing toward the great object of their visits; although all had run smoothly up to this time. They had boated, ridden, hunted, danced and sung with the two beauties, to their hearts' content, but without either of them offering his heart and hand to Marietta, who seemed to court their visits. The youthful quartette were seldom attended beyond the walls of the hacienda by Don Miguel; but he never failed to caution his daughter and Celesta—the latter being very dear to him—never to go beyond the horse-range, or the call of his *vaqueros*.

For months all had been tranquil at Rancho del Laguna, and the wide circling range owned by Don Miguel Martinez; but this tranquillity was ominous of coming danger. No small predatory parties had of late run off stock, or killed a *vaquero*; no one, for quite a length of time, had been slain and scalped by the dreaded Apaches.

The unusual inactivity of Indians and bandits had caused the denizens of this extensive *hacienda* to become quite careless; but their fancied security was fated to be broken in upon by a strange series of tragic occurrences, from a totally unexpected and undreamed-of quarter.

As utter stillness in the vicinity of an Indian attacking party points to some desperate strategic and dastardly assault, so does an unusual period of inactivity and absence of tragic events at exposed points on the American frontier, lead the border people to fear that when danger does come, it will be in a most appalling form. If the probability of an attack, from either Indians or bandits, or a thought that danger from spies and assassins lurked within his own gardens—if such omens entered the mind of Don Miguel, he did not alarm any members of his household by informing them. It is certain that he was most blessed in being held in happy ignorance of the terrible calamities which, in the near future, were to overwhelm him and his in the most fearful anguish.

Upon the day on which we wish to call the attention of the reader to Rancho del Laguna, both the young men from Carzal, who have been mentioned, were visiting at the hacienda; and upon their awakening from an after-dinner *siesta*, with choice *Habanas* between their lips, had gone out through the shrubbery toward a pretty flower-wreathed arbor within the gardens—the afternoon retreat of the beauties of Rancho del Laguna.

In the arbor were hung two hammocks, above which, through the trellis-work and vines and flowers, grew oranges, limes and figs, while huge clusters of almost every variety of tropic bloom hung luxuriantly on every side. The air was heavy with perfume, and when the young *caballeros* caught sight of the beauties of the Rancho they were languidly reclining, half in and half out of their hammocks. With natural, but most artistic attitude, their long tresses hanging unconfined like draperies over the side of their couches, the vision was fair indeed.

"*Silencio!*"

"*Santissima Maria!*"

The latter exclamation came in a hiss of extreme surprise.

CHAPTER IV.

BEAUTIFUL AND TERRIBLE.

THERE was no need for Francisco to whisper any admonition, for both the black and the blue eyes opened languidly, and Marietta, with an imperious wave of her hand and the air of a queen, cried out in mock vexation:

"*Caspita! Los senoritos saber la tierra.*"

"Yes," agreed Francisco, quickly; "we do know the ground, and the time has passed when by your royal mandates we were to appear before you. For all that, we regret, more than language can express, if we have deprived you of one iota of your *siesta*. Do we intrude?"

"*Quien sabe!*"

Thus replied Marietta, returning as she spoke to her former position, folding her arms and closing her eyes. Celesta, thrown from her usual reserve by the peculiar conduct of her cousin, broke out in a peal of the merriest and most musical laughter.

"*Santissima Maria!*" muttered Pedro, in confidence to Francisco, as if for the first time he had noticed anything worthy of merit in Celesta; "her laughter is like the rippling song of the *cenzontle!*"

"*Bien dicha!*" (well said) agreed Francisco. "You have hit the nail on the head, as the Americans say."

At this moment Marietta sprang to a sitting posture and shook out her wealth of midnight hair, to enable the cool breeze from the *laguna* to permeate its meshes; then, waving her hand as before and without a smile upon her lips, she still acted her part of imperious vexation.

"*Dos vaso de vino dulce.*"

"*Bueno bravo!*" exclaimed Celesta, filled with admiration for her cousin's apt assuming of authority.

"*Muy buenos!*" said Francisco, quickly, with the voice and manner of a servitor; "your orders shall be obeyed. In place of two glasses of wine, I'll roll two casks to your royal presence."

As he spoke, he darted into the shrubbery in the direction of the *casa*, leaving Pedro standing somewhat embarrassed, as he was not quite equal to entering into the play in the spirit of his *compadre*, Marietta not having designated any choice between the two young men when she ordered, in so imperious manner, the two glasses of sweet wine.

"*Traiga agua!*" she again called out, in a tone of command, waving her jeweled hand as she did so.

Pedro dashed away, his ears filled with the flute-like laughter of Celesta, which was now mingled with the no less demonstrative mirth of Marietta; and as he and Francisco had never before been permitted to approach the private arbor of the *senoritas*, he felt that he, as well as his friend, was getting on familiar terms with the heiress, and he resolved to take time by the forelock and get ahead of his *compadre* in proposing marriage to Marietta. Not for a moment did Pedro, in his egotistical mind, suppose that Francisco could hold any advantage over him; just the opposite, indeed, for he felt assured that the charms of his person and manners were far superior to those of his rival, and the fact that the fortune which would be his at

his father's death was double that which Francisco could ever hope to control, was well known to Don Miguel Martinez and his daughter.

All this pleased him. It placed him in a confident frame of mind, and he felt something very like contempt for Francisco, for attempting to gain the affections of the heiress of Rancho del Laguna.

Overtaking an *aguador*, or water-carrier in the *patio*, toiling from the boat landing near the confluence of the river and the *laguna*, Pedro, his mind bent upon his project for the near future, in connection with an alliance with the peerless Marietta, and entirely losing sight of his present opportunities, and his liabilities to make mistakes with the haughty beauty, ordered the peon to procure fresh water from a cooler at the *casa*, and convey the same to the arbor of his mistress. Seemingly proud of his mission, as far as the trivial notice of Pedro went, the latter turned and sauntered back to the bower of beauty, Francisco passing him by another and parallel path, bearing in one hand a decanter of sparkling wine, and two delicate glasses in the other.

Thus unobserved, Pedro reached the arbor at the same moment with his rival, to find that the *senoritas* had left their hammocks, arranged their hair, and were promenading over the paved walk.

Francisco went directly to the arbor, placed the decanter and glasses upon a small stand, and then catching it up, bore it to the walk, and stood with it in front of Marietta and Celesta, who filled their glasses—the young man keeping up, all the while, the respectful air and manner of a servant, not a word escaping his lips.

"*Mil gracias!*" chorused the two fair ones, smiling in consonance with the meaning of the words.

"No thanks are needed, ladies," said Francisco, in the most humble manner, "when a command is obeyed."

"Why did you not bring more glasses?" asked Marietta, as she tapped the young man's cheek playfully with her fingers, neither of them having, up to this time, perceived that Pedro had returned.

"We do not wish to drink alone. Do we, Celesta?"

"*Silencio!*" whispered the latter, in a cautionary way.

She had heard the sound of Pedro's feet on the pave.

"*Quien es?*" demanded Marietta, half turning about.

"It is only Pedro," said Francisco. "Who else could it be, except Don Miguel? Why so timid?"

"*Caspita!*" exclaimed Marietta, with no little show of indignation. "Where is the water I desired you to bring?"

"Ordered me, you mean," said Pedro, with an assumed laugh, beginning to realize that he had committed a grave mistake, and one that might jeopardize his suit. So embarrassed was he, that he blundered still more deeply, by adding:

"I sent one of your *aguadors* after it. I am not a peon, *Senorita Martinez*; although I would submit to such slavery, were it to serve you exclusively."

The last words were spoken as he saw that Marietta was really offended with him, and Celesta and Francisco exchanged glances of surprise at the turn which affairs had so suddenly taken.

At this moment, to make matters even more embarrassing, the nearly naked *aguador* appeared upon the scene with a pitcher and goblets. Both the *senoritas* were much amazed, for these miserable servitors are never allowed to enter the presence of the household, or to frequent such portions of the grounds as are sacred to the family.

Pedro was dumfounded, but he was not by any means prepared for what was to follow.

With an air of the utmost scorn and contempt, Marietta pointed to the table, and then stepped to one side to allow the *aguador* to place the pitcher and glasses upon it; then, pointing in the direction he was to go, she haughtily dismissed the peon, who vanished in the shrubbery.

Turning with the look of an outraged queen, Marietta addressed Pedro, more in contempt than anger:

"Pedro Mercedo! You have either forgotten that your father educated you as a *caballero*, if there were none of the elements of a gentleman in you naturally, or you have forgotten the character of the company you are in, and the respect due to the humblest of our sex. Go! I think that perhaps you might meet more congenial society in the *jauls* of my father's peons, if even they will tolerate your presence!"

Scathing words were these, and somewhat more bitter and burning than the occasion called for, but Marietta Martinez was one who, from childhood, had been petted, and had her slightest order obeyed; and the neglect, indeed the flat refusal, to bring her a glass of water—and more especially after Francisco had departed so cheerfully for the wine, infuriated her greatly. Then the bringing of the water by the nearly nude *aguador*, under the orders of Pedro, was

interpreted by her as a direct insult, and added much to a wrath that was still further augmented by the manner of the young man, when he reminded her that he was not a peon, by these words insinuating that he would consider himself humiliated by attending to a want of hers.

For a few seconds after the young girl had spoken, Pedro stood gazing toward the trio in a dazed manner; but, when the insulting signification of her language was fully understood by him, his face became contorted with the most fiendish passion, and his true character was at once revealed. Realizing at once that a breach had been made between the senorita and himself, and well knowing that she was one who would never forgive or overlook his conduct sufficiently to reinstate him on the same footing as heretofore, he became perfectly furious in his insane anger, and cried out, in a voice that was hoarse with passion:

"Senorita Martinez, you forget to whom you speak! A Mercado brooks not insult, and I shall hold your father responsible for your conduct and words. I am not, I repeat, a peon or a dog that I can be driven at the whim of a girl, yet in her teens, and who has been spoiled by the most absurd over-indulgence!"

Marietta turned pale as death, and Celesta clung trembling to her arm, as the former replied:

"Once more, sir, leave these grounds, or I will order my peons to hurl you over the wall! Francisco, will you stand idly by and hear a coward insult two helpless women?"

This was enough, for the man addressed had been boiling over with rage, eager to resent the insult to the woman he loved; but knowing her character, he had not thought it policy to take a hand until the moment for it had arrived.

It had now come, and he sprung with the agility of a panther toward his former friend; and before Pedro really comprehended his position, dreaming not of an attack, Francisco had given him a violent slap on the face.

The next instant a stiletto flashed in the right hand of each.

Marietta stood calm and cold; but Celesta, seeing Francisco, the man she loved, in deadly peril, threw to the winds all her resolutions to hide that love, and with a cry of agony bounded to ward off a murderous thrust from Francisco, and fell into his arms only to have her shoulder pierced by the stiletto of Pedro.

The vengeful *caballero* sprung back aghast at his dastardly deed.

At the same moment the form of a man darted from the shrubbery, and Pedro was caught up and hurled out afar over the *cacti*, his body striking the water of the river with a sounding splash!

All supposed the new-comer to be some one belonging to the hacienda, and so paid no immediate attention to him. So opportune had been his movement that the stiletto had been left in the shoulder of the poor girl, and neither Marietta nor Francisco dared draw it out for fear of increasing the hemorrhage.

The manner of Marietta was now entirely changed. She felt that she had been the direct cause of it all, and began to weep hysterically.

But Francisco saw the necessity for being prompt.

Celesta was carried at once to her room, and Don Miguel, who was something of a surgeon, was summoned to attend his beautiful but unfortunate ward.

The old Don was terribly agitated and deeply concerned, besides being amazed at what he supposed as an attempted assassination within the walls of the *casa*; but he crushed down his curiosity, and drawing out the knife from the wound, discovered the name of the owner.

"Father," asked Marietta, "will she live?"

"She will live—*Gracias a Dios!*" was the reply.

CHAPTER V.

"LUNY LIZE."

At the head of a rocky gorge in the Apache mountains, but a short distance from Fort Davis, we next draw the attention of the reader.

This gorge opens on Wild Rose Pass, but as the entrance is hidden by trees and stunted cedars, which screen even the rocks for some distance above, no one would discover an opening in the rocky ledge, except by accident.

The bed of the gorge rises gradually upward, and at its head is an opening of half an acre in extent, circular in form, and covered with grass, *cacti*, and brilliant flowers; the secret of the verdure and vegetation being a spring, which bubbles from the base of the rocks at the upper side of the cosy spot.

Within a small clump of cedars is a little log-cabin, quite screened from view. Within this cabin, which is but a single room, the furnishing is much better than could be looked for in such an isolated situation. Various articles of female apparel hang from pegs, but they are mostly of beaded buckskin, such as is worn by the Indian squaws. Navajo blankets, of brilliant colors, are also hung near the door, as well as arms of war, belonging to both whites and reds.

But the woman, who occupies the couch is no

squaw; and the man, who stands straight as a sheltered pine tree, near the bed, is no Indian brave.

The pair are none others, gentle reader, than Lizzie Ellsworth and Frontier Frank, the scout.

The former has changed from the beautiful girl whom we saw to a woman in looks, though not in years. She has been aged by sorrow and anguish which no pen can describe. Her face is drawn and pinched, and her eyes are sunken, and seem to glare with an insane, unnatural light.

Frank has also changed. Misery and suffering have left their marks, though he still retains a robust, athletic frame, and a face bronzed with the sun.

But one short twelvemonth has passed since the night of the fandango in El Paso—the terrible night, which brought so much agony to them both. Again they have met.

"Tell me, Frank," said Lizzie, who lay apparently ill upon the couch, "tell me the sad story once more. I have forgotten it nearly all."

"Only be calm," advised the scout, himself greatly agitated. "Are you strong enough to hear it?"

"Yes, yes, Frank! I can bear it all. My brain is seared. How long have I been—not myself?"

"It is now nearly two weeks since you have spoken a rational word, but you have not been violent, and you have been well cared for by that Indian squaw. Your child—the last words seemed to choke him—"Do you feel as if you could get up, and walk a few steps?"

"I am well enough to hear the story, Frank. I want to hear all about that fearful night."

"Well, Lizzie, the story is a short one. I shot down a few of the desperadoes, grasped your senseless form, and escaped to the river. While waiting to calm myself, for I was greatly excited, a blinding shot from some unknown hand laid me senseless. I believe that shot was fired by Capitan Martinez. When I became conscious, I was in a miserable *jacal* in the suburbs of Franklin, and an old Mexican woman, whom I had often befriended, was bending over me. I questioned her eagerly, and to my consternation was informed that I had been under her care for several weeks, having had an attack of brain fever, besides being in great danger of death from a gun-shot wound through my lungs. Her son had been at the fandango in El Paso, and knew of my connection with the fight.

"Finding me insensible at the ferry, he had procured help, got me over the river, and brought a doctor. My horse and equipments he had also found, and took them to his mother's *jacal*.

"From him, too, I learned that you had not returned to El Paso, and could not be found when your father died. I knew then, as well as I do now, what had happened. By this time I was nearly insane, and almost discouraged, for Capitan Martinez had not been seen in El Paso, and no one knew where he was.

"However, I found out that he had a double motive in your ruin; for, upon a certain occasion, your father, while with a party of American and Mexican officers at a town, down on the Rio Grande, had not only won considerable money from Martinez at cards, but had slapped his face, and called him a liar and a coward, because the capitan had accused him of cheating.

"Although I was almost confident that you had plunged into the waters of the Rio Grande, I still kept up my search. I bribed the old hag, in whose charge you had been, to give me a piece of the cloth of which your dress was made. It had a peculiar figure, and I knew that if you were alive I could trace you by it. I found that you had crossed the river to Franklin, in disguise, as far as your features went; but you betrayed yourself in the town, by seeking information in regard to your father's grave. You were then insane, but cunning with it all; and I traced you about the chaparrals, finding, here and there, rags of your dress adhering to the *cacti*. At last, I reasoned that you would naturally make your way back to Fort Davis, where you had passed so many happy hours. Nor was I wrong; for, upon taking the trail, I found signs of your presence on every side, until I came up with you in Wild Rose Pass. Insane though you still were, I had great influence over you, and induced you to come to this cabin, where I had provided for your care and protection. When I returned from a hunt, three months ago, I found that your little girl had been born, and you had, for a time, recovered your reason. It was then that you adjured me to grant you a favor.

"Lizzie, I loved you the first time that I saw you—I have always loved you since, and I love you now! I could not resist you. I not only promised, but I took a solemn oath to be guided entirely by your wishes in accomplishing the revenge I had resolved upon. And now I ask, will you not release me from that oath?"

During this recital Lizzie Ellsworth lay as silent as death. She held out her hand at its close, and the scout caught and kissed it passionately.

"Lizzie," he said, "I know you are innocent

of all wrong. I love you more than all the world. Only release me from my oath, that I may kill the fiend who has brought all this anguish upon us. Think what might have been but for that bullet of his—think of what may be yet! We care not for the world. We will live in a world of our own. Tell me, at last, will you be my wife?"

Frontier Frank's soul was in his eyes as he spoke. The poor woman was silent for a full minute, and then a sound seemed to arouse her. It was the wail of the babe at her side. She arose to a sitting posture, and cried out:

"No, Frank; I cannot marry you! I love you too well for that. Neither can I release you from your oath. I have plans of my own for revenge, and they must not be interfered with. When he who has cursed our lives is dead I will marry you, if you wish it then; but he must not die by your hand. You know—you have told me—that the fiend Martinez was married only the week after he left me, and his wife has now an infant daughter also.

"Now, hear me, Frontier Frank! I swear that my child shall be reared in the Rancho del Laguna, and the child of this wife whom he has taken shall roam the wilds, and associate with the rough men of the border, as he has doomed me to do. And if another child is born to him—I cannot speak his name—if another should be born, 'Lize'—'Crazy Lize,' as the boys called me in Franklin—will steal it! Then his wife will die, and he will go down to the grave in sorrow before his time.

"The future is teeming with tortures for him, tortures such as would make the fiends laugh with joy to know. I shall live—God will spare me, and use me as an instrument to punish the transgressor. My wrongs have been most terrible; and you, Frank, have also suffered. But, let us bide our time, and drown every thought of love in the torrent of revenge. I will try and get up from this couch to-day, and in another week I hope to be strong enough to go to Laguna del Patos. You have helped in the good work greatly by finding his haunt.

"May God forever bless you, Frontier Frank! Surely He will reward you for your love, your trust, and the sacrifices you have made for a lone, forsaken, friendless wretch like me! You never yet kissed me, Frank—kiss me now!"

"Would to God that I never had!" exclaimed the young scout, as, with tears in his eyes, he pressed the emaciated form to his breast.

"What mean you, Frank?" she asked, in wonder.

"I mean that had I not stopped to worship and embrace you, as you lay insensible on the bank of the Bravo, all this misery, this agony of mind and body, might not have been our lot."

"What is to be, will be, Frank," she replied, in a quiet tone. "A very simple event may appear to change our whole lives, but yet I cannot but believe it to be foreordained. Justice, it seems to me, is unknown upon this earth. Some are born to lives that are free from sorrow and pain; others know only anguish from the cradle to the grave. However, I shall work out my ends at all hazards. Capitan Martinez shall curse the day he ever saw the light. He shall live to curse the mother that bore him. I have sworn it—I, the wreck, the disgraced, the polluted one! I swear it by my hopes of happiness hereafter, that has been denied me here. Yes, I shall live!"

The massive frame of Frontier Frank shuddered, while his blood chilled with horror; for, although still weak as an infant, poor Lizzie had sprung to her feet, and her eyes were glaring with insanity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORK IS BEGUN.

WE will now explain more fully the doings and the happenings at Rancho del Laguna, something of which has been learned by the story which was told to Lizzie Ellsworth by Frontier Frank.

It had taken much time and patient scouting for Frank to ascertain the abiding-place of Capitan Martinez, and much more to find out the facts which he related to the unfortunate woman whom he loved so truly; but he had succeeded without having betrayed his interest and the object he had in view to the parties of whom he inquired, who would have caused him great trouble had they known his real character and designs. Frank spoke Spanish fluently, which was a great advantage to him, and his cunning as a scout enabled him to penetrate secretly all points of the hacienda, a plan of which he traced on paper and gave to "Luny Lize," as the poor girl persisted in calling herself during her insanity, and also in her lucid moments.

Capitan Martinez had been engaged to marry the daughter of a rich hacendado at the time of his first meeting with Elizabeth Ellsworth, and a week from the day of his leaving El Paso he had wedded the lady and taken her to Rancho del Laguna, where, within less than a year, a female child was born to them.

The father of the capitan died some three months after the birth of this infant, and the Mexican officer retired from the army and became a Don, inheriting the vast estates and stock of his parent.

It is almost needless to say that his gambling and drinking bouts were more frequent than ever; but he loved his little baby daughter most devotedly, and the infant was almost too angelic for earth.

An aged Mexican woman was selected as nurse, and charged never to leave the child alone, and, when the little one was about six months old, the nurse with a needle, pricked into its arm, in vermilion, the representation of an alligator. She kept this from the knowledge of Don Miguel, but her act had been observed by no other than Frontier Frank, who had been watching through the grated window, in the night time.

A few months after this, Frank detailed the discoveries he had made to Elizabeth, who was now strong enough to leave the cabin; and, in a few days, she set out in the night, leaving a note for Frank, telling him her proposed movements and intention.

Upon a fleet mustang, and carrying her child lashed to her back, Indian-like, she crossed the Rio Grande, and eventually arrived at Laguna de los Patos on a dark night, having timed her movements to this end. She made her way through the timber, unlocked the huge gate that led from the casa yard to the Laguna, by a key that had been stolen for her by Frank, and entered the gardens of the hacienda.

At this time the poor girl was partially sane, and she succeeded, not only in gaining entrance to the casa of her betrayer, but in substituting her own child for his, changing the garments, and retaining for the stolen babe only its under-clothing.

The resemblance between the infants was so strong that the exchange was not discovered. Having thus accomplished it, the half-demented woman galloped back to her cabin in the Apache mountains, where she kept the child for many years. Frontier Frank visited her frequently, and often was the bearer of letters from her to the master of Rancho del Laguna, which he contrived to place in the private apartment of Don Miguel in some mysterious manner. They always informed him that the American girl, he had so basely wronged in El Paso, still lived; that she was watching his every movement, and working out a terrible revenge. These missives kept Don Martinez in constant terror, he being, as we have already seen, a vile, cowardly cur—in fact, he now led a life of constant fear, expecting to be assassinated at any time, day or night, the presence of these letters in such a place proving that Lizzie Ellsworth, or her agents, had him completely at bay, and defenseless.

Although he took every precaution, as far as bars and locks went, still these mysterious epistles came regularly, and he began to grow old before his time, with the coward fears that ruled him constantly.

Two years after his marriage—which had been a union of policy, without love—a son was born to him; an heir to his vast estates, that were now constantly increasing in value, and a grand *fiesta* was given in honor of the joyful event.

On seating himself at dinner on this great occasion, Don Miguel, to his horror, found one of the dreaded epistles under his plate; and, thrusting the same into his breast unnoticed, he longed for a moment's privacy in which to read it, for these letters, threatening though they always were in their tone, had a strange fascination for him: such, indeed, as to cause him the utmost misery until he had mastered the contents of each, when it arrived.

This spoiled his dinner, and cast a cloud over the whole assemblage of guests, who could not help being affected by the strange manner of their host, who, strive as he would, could not shake off the dread that the letter, in the well-known hand, produced.

The *fiesta* was a gloomy affair in consequence; and, when at last Don Martinez found an opportunity, he excused himself, went to his apartment, tore open the envelope, and then, when he contemplated the fearful import of its contents, grew pale, trembled, and then fell to the floor in convulsions. Here he lay until his wife became alarmed, and went to his room, when she found the letter still clutched in his unconscious hand.

He had never made a confidante of his spouse, therefore she was not only amazed, but terribly alarmed at its contents, fully looking for the author to carry out her threats at any moment. So, upon the recovery of her husband, the senora concluded to take her turn, and went into violent hysterics. This broke up the festivities, and caused the guests to return to their distant homes much perplexed and disappointed. The letter ran as follows:

"DON MIGUEL MARTINEZ:—

"The birds whispered in the ear of the writer that Miguel Martinez is the last of his line—that his estates at his death will go to the Republic. The little birds never lie. Who shall say how long the boy heir will sleep beneath the roof of his father? Let him take his chances in the world; a vagrant, like the many bastards his parent has brought into a life of misery and suffering. The mills of the gods grind slowly, but exceedingly fine. Beware, Don Miguel! The one you so basely betrayed at El Paso is on your track. She hears your moans at night, and

sees your coward glances into every bush by day. She is no assassin. If she were, your carcass would, long ere this, have been food for coyotes. She holds the fate—the lives—of you and yours in the palm of her hand. Beware! For God is just, and the punishment of the transgressor is as sure as the rising of the sun. Your end will be most terrible; and remember that you are doomed to die by the hand of

"ELIZABETH ELLSWORTH."

As may be supposed, this epistle created a coldness between man and wife, that had not, up to this time, existed; though their conduct had always been somewhat reserved toward each other.

Senora Martinez was so concerned in regard to the safety of her boy, that she kept the child in her presence constantly; and also the little girl, she being in continual dread of their being stolen.

This anxiety preyed upon her mind to such an extent that she became really ill, and remained an invalid until her death, which occurred when her boy was five years of age, and the girl, six.

The boy was christened, after his father, Miguel; and as time advanced, the Don became less and less anxious in regard to losing him. So, when the blow at length fell, it brought with it more abject misery and hopeless despair than it otherwise would have done. It came just one year from the night on which the Senora Martinez died.

A fearful storm had been raging, but that was nothing to the storm that raged in the mind and heart of Don Miguel. Words cannot express his anguish, for the wretched man worshiped his children; this being in truth, the one redeeming trait in his false and corrupt nature.

The country was scoured, but without effect; for no Mexicans could outwit or double on the famous scout, Frontier Frank, who, with "Luny Lize," as the reader knows was the daring abductor.

Years passed, and Don Martinez gave up all hope of again seeing his little son.

Thus were matters at Rancho del Laguna, Marietta Martinez being really the nameless child of Lizzie Ellsworth, although ignorant of the fact; as, of course, was also Don Miguel.

Seventeen years passed between the time that the Mexican officer whirled in the waltz at the fandango in El Paso and the day that the stranger threw Pedro Mercedo over the wall at the hacienda, after the latter had accidentally stabbed Celesta Carasco, in his struggle with Francisco Martino, and these had been eventful years.

The manner in which Crazy Lize disposed of the little son of her betrayer must be left to another chapter; but we may here state, that the once beautiful maid of Wild Rose Pass the Pride of Fort Davis, lost her identity in these years, and became known everywhere on the border, between Horse Head Crossing and Santa Fe, as "Crazy Lize," and that she really merited the cognomen, being as wild, fearless and desperate, as any Apache brave. She went at will from one branch of the tribe to another, and being considered "Big Medicine," by the superstitious Indians, did pretty much as she pleased.

All this time Frontier Frank suffered all the tortures that a loyal, loving heart could possibly do; witnessing, as he did, the gradual, but sure drifting of the only woman whom he ever cared for, into hopeless insanity. This racked his heart, but he felt some consolation in knowing that he was the only human being who could, in any way, influence her; and also, in keeping a watchful eye upon her child, Marietta Martinez of Rancho del Laguna. Back and forth, from El Paso to the Apache mountains, galloped "Crazy Lize," often warning the whites of the projected raids of the Indians, although the red-men never suspected her of it. Often and often, from the thick branches of the trees, she had gazed down into the gardens of Rancho del Laguna upon her beautiful daughter, whose caresses were denied her, through her own thirst for revenge.

The girl she had stolen from Don Miguel Martinez, or for whom she had substituted her own, she placed in the care of an old Mexican woman in Franklin, as she did not wish to leave the child alone in the mountain cabin when she was off on her wild wanderings; and, at the time of the humiliation of Pedro Mercedo in the gardens of the Rancho del Laguna, this girl, who had been aptly named by Crazy Lize, Dolores, was about the same age as the beautiful Marietta Martinez, who had, unknowingly, usurped her name and place, and was now enjoying the wealth and splendor to which the outcast Dolores had been born.

And now, gentle reader, it shall be my task to lead you on wilder trails, and to show you scenes seemingly not of earth, but yet true as life and fate.

CHAPTER VII.

A BLASTED HOME.

WHEN Elizabeth Ellsworth stole little Miguel, she had been forced to apply a kerchief saturated with ether to the nostrils of the boy, in order to take him from the casa without

awakening him, and alarming the members of the household; Frontier Frank having lassoed both the porter and the watchman, and secured them, gagged and bound, to trees, without creating any disturbance.

Once clear of the gardens, the demented woman hastened through the dark timber, Frontier Frank having acted as vedette at the walls of the hacienda, and within call.

The wind howled and shrieked, the thunder rolled, and the lightning flashed; but all this tumult of nature was in perfect consonance with the heart and brain of the deeply injured and vengeful woman. Claspings the sleeping boy to her breast, she climbed into the saddle, her horse snorting with terror, as the blinding flashes of lightning hissed through the air, while, between the flashes, the night was as dark as Erebus.

Frontier Frank dashed up to the side of his strange companion; and, although he felt that it was wrong to cause the innocent children to suffer for the crime of their father, wrong to deprive them of their rights, and doom them to lives of hardship, perhaps of misery—still he knew it was worse than useless to argue the question with one who had been so terribly wronged. For all this, the scout vowed that he would devote his life to these little ones, Marietta, little Miguel, and the child whom Lizzie had named Dolores. He would watch over all three of them, and would strive to make their paths as smooth as was in his power, hoping that it might end well for them, though determined that the guilty should suffer.

True and firm as his love was for Lizzie Ellsworth, poor Frank was hopeless as to the future; but his life, in the free, bracing air of the prairies and mountains, and amid constant adventures, served to rasp off the roughest edges of his disappointment and grief.

"Ha! ha! Frank, is that you?"

The exultant laugh of the triumphant woman broke on the air.

"True to the last, is my Frank," she added. And then—"I have it; the last of the Martinez spawn is in my power, and never, unless I so will it, shall he look upon his son again. Come, we must reach the Rio Grande before we draw rein. It is a glorious night, is it not? How I would like to shriek in his window, and tell him that I am still watching him! But there is no need. He will know, to his sorrow, who has done it."

As the lurid flashes grew more vivid, and the pair cleared the timber, Lizzie appeared like an avenging spirit from some infernal sphere. What she had been, and what she now was, struck the scout most painfully, reviving the severest pangs he had experienced. On she rode, clad in a suit of beaded buckskin, and with a bowie and a "navy six" in her belt; her whole appearance being that of an Indian squaw rather than a lady born.

Thus appeared the girl who had been so justly the pride of Fort Davis; her wrongs, and a not unnatural thirst for vengeance, having aged her as well.

The scout would have given years of his life to be released from his oath, in order that he might kill the hated Don Miguel, and thus end the torturing life that was being led by himself and the woman he had so madly worshiped in the past; but nothing that he could urge availed to change the poor wronged creature from her purpose.

He now drove spurs to his horse, without speaking a word, and they shot over the plain in the direction of the Rio Bravo, in the very teeth of the wind, both presenting a strange and weird picture, as the lightning, now and then, revealed their forms flying across the wide prairie.

Eventually they reached the retired cabin that had been built for "Luny Lize" by the scout, in the midst of the scoria rocks of the Apache Mountains, and adjacent to Wild Rose Pass.

The boy Miguel, who was now named "Muchacho del Noche," or "Boy of the Night," by poor Lizzie, was kept for a short time in the cabin, and then taken by his abductors to be reared as an Apache chief, as will appear later; but, in the meantime, Lizzie discovered that a picture of an alligator had been pricked into the arm of the child in vermilion, exactly as it had been with the girl whom she had taken in exchange for her own daughter. This worried her not a little, and hastened the departure of the poor mad creature to the retreat of old Cochise with Muchacho del Noche—both her departure and the Apache valley being unknown to Frontier Frank.

The old Mexican woman, who had the care of the children of Don Miguel, knew, of course, that the little girl whom she had marked had been stolen, and another substituted, but she had never dared reveal the fact to her master, Don Miguel. She lavished as much love and tender care upon the strange babe, as she could have shown for the little one that had so mysteriously disappeared. She believed, however, that the future would bring about a restoration of the children to their rights, and that through the marks she had placed upon them, they could easily be identified; so, as the best

thing to be done in the present state of things, she pricked into the arm of the false Marietta, the representation of a turtle. She confessed the facts to Padre Jose, of Carizal, but he, though resolved to do all in his power to reinstate the rightful heirs, saw that it would add to the torture of the wretched Don Miguel, to inform him that he had lost, not only his son, but his daughter as well.

We will not here attempt to describe the wild grief and despair of Don Miguel, upon being told of the loss of the little boy he had so idolized.

Scouting parties were sent out in all directions, and heavy rewards were offered to the Mestizoes, or half-breeds, who were known to have communication with the Apaches of the Sierra Madre; although they all knew full well that the child had not been taken by the Indians. At last, even Don Miguel gave up all hope of ever again seeing his son; and he grew gray and wrinkled, in the bitterness of his great misery. Marietta strove to comfort him, and proved herself a most affectionate daughter; but, had he known that his legal daughter was then being reared in Franklin, in poverty, it would have filled him with fury against her.

Don Miguel was at times, after the loss of his son and heir, addicted to drink; and, during his intermittent sprees, he would visit El Paso, Carizal, Chihuahua, and various other towns and stations, sometimes in disguise, in the hope of finding some trace of his lost boy. During such times, he was in constant fear of meeting Elizabeth Ellsworth, always picturing her as much the same as when he last saw her, and little imagining that the demented, hag-like woman whom he frequently heard spoken of, and sometimes even met, was the once fair girl whom he had ruined.

His old army associates were all dead, and but few people in El Paso remembered him; now knowing him only as the wealthy hacendado of Rancho del Laguna. Padre Jose of Carizal, the confessor of Don Miguel, felt great sympathy for him in his terrible affliction; but still, he dared not disclose the truth in regard to the arm-marks—his somewhat stupid brain being unable to reason that he could reveal the existence of the mark on the arm of the boy, without in any way hinting at the case of the girl—and it was not until a few days previous to the duel between Pedro Mercedo and Francisco Martino, that Padre Jose suddenly bethought himself that this could be done; berating himself for a complicated idiot, for not having had sense enough to see this much before, and perhaps being the means of discovering the lost heir.

Don Miguel Martinez was greatly rejoiced at the information thus given him, and not only rewarded the good padre but paid for masses to be said for the repose of the soul of the old woman—now gone to her account—who had shown herself to be far above her station in thus putting a mark upon the arm of his son.

It had been only on the death-bed of the old peon that she had found the courage to confess her secret, fearing that if she breathed it, even in the confessional, her master would in some way hear it, and then his curse would follow, if not personal violence, even to the extent of taking her life.

CHAPTER VIII. APACHE LAND.

A HELLISH scene—unearthly, and still of earth. A scene, situated in a region explored by but a few, and most of whom died a lingering death by torture.

A scene truly infernal, located in a region that is still but little known, and which will remain untenanted by civilized men for many years to come—a fitting place for dastard deeds of blood and carnage and death!

Peaks, that were scattered in wild disorder, iron-rusted, fire-scorched scoriae, seemingly vomited up in pre-historic days; adamantite crags, rugged, and guarded by natural towers and battlements, with here and there basaltic columns, strange shafts that blocked the entrance, perhaps to some scene that is still more unearthly.

Certainly the vast plains of salt, sulphur, bitumen and alkali, which are found in the regions of the Staked Plains and are devoid of all verdure, seem not to belong to earth. And yet these same barren wastes would be a Paradise compared with the monster basin we have but faintly described, where on all sides is suggested little but the refuse from the furnaces of Jove, hurled in wild disorder by an army of Titans.

The scene, while not without its weird charm, is one calculated to cause one to shrink within himself and doubt that he could be known and cared for by that Supreme Being, who has formed, and who holds in place, such vast, immeasurable, and terrible grandeur.

The hot sun from a southern sky blazes straight down from mid-heavens with its most intense power, causing a quivering of heat upon the reddish rocks, which seem to the observer to be still smoldering with the fires that have burned them from all earthly semblance; and this, added to the desolation of the view, makes

the earth at large appear but the creation of a dream, so impressively unnatural are the surroundings.

Not a vestige of life, either animal or vegetable, not even a soaring buzzard in the burning sky, is there to detain us; but, determined explorers that we are, we turn not back on our trail.

Trail, did we say? Ye gods! An iron-hoofed Jumbo, or even a thousand of them, one following the other among the scattered debris of scoria, would be untraceable on these adamantite rocks!

Having taken in the outline of the view, we gaze about our near vicinage, determined to see and inspect all that is to be seen.

To our right is a perpendicular opening in the solid rock, as if, for some fifty feet, a slice had been cut out, thirty feet in width, from the rock above to a platform, slightly elevated, and but little removed from our position.

This has the appearance of being a passage-way into the heart of the range between two peaks that tower for thousands of feet. And, strange and unaccountable as it seems, we observe that the entrance and the interior sides of this passage are guarded, or ornamented, by slender spiral columns of basalt—possibly pillars would be more appropriate.

The fact of the mounts having been split asunder by some convulsion is strange enough; but the presence of these pillars is still more so, for the question arises—how, in what manner, were they created and so placed, and when? Certainly it must have been since the mountain parted; and, as they bear the same marks of volcanic heat, the bursting asunder of the range must have been prior to or at the moment of a terrible eruption.

As we step upon the platform of the base of the mountain range the huge chasm below, which extends for miles, appears to be a monster crater, from which, at one time, shot and hissed, a thousand feet upward, its devastating fire and lava.

Here, too, we are more and more astonished at the hideous forbiddingness of the vast entrance; in fact, every step toward the portal of the vast cavern which might easily be imagined the abode of the giants of fable, reveals fresh wonders, for, interspersed with the basaltic columns are rocks which resemble terrible beasts and hideous reptiles, as though placed to guard the gap, or as if they had crawled thither and crouched in the positions in which they are now shown as in bas-relief. So it is at every point within the scope of vision.

Instinctively we halt, with a strange dread which we cannot throw off, when, to our relief, we see, for the first time since we entered the range, a different color from the hitherto unvarying iron-rust, and this is white—spotless white. Within this gigantic gap the sun shines not, and it is comparatively dark; but the background, being relieved by this white surface, makes it more noticeable by contrast. This white is in the shape of a bent bow, bulging downward, and although everything is still as death amid the peaks, this strange, bow-like form seems to sway slowly, as if each end was loosely attached to either side of the gap. So we advance, filled with curiosity.

As our eyes become accustomed to the change from the glaring sun, we distinguish the character of the new discovery and shudder with horror, while, at the same time, we are relieved to know that there have been, and quite lately, other human beings than ourselves within the fearful precincts of the crater, and who have probably found the remains of a party of former explorers, and have suspended a portion of the same in a conspicuous place where danger most threatens, to warn the adventurous spirits who may hereafter endeavor to follow up the gap.

There is no difficulty now in deciding that the white objects are at least three-score of human skulls, strung, bead-like, upon a rope, each end being secured to either wall.

We next discover that the flooring of the gap is covered with water about an inch deep at all points, flowing from the interior and disappearing forever at our very feet in a narrow crevice of the rock. With hasty steps we proceed onward, the shallow sheet of water being no hindrance to our progress, and pass beneath the swaying skulls. We have seen strange and mysterious sights, but we push forward determined to explore still further. We soon discover that the water pours out from the right wall into a natural trough, which overflows only toward us, the interior of the same being above the level of the chasm. Stepping over this trough upon the dry rock, the sound of our footsteps echoing strangely, we start back suddenly in astonishment, for there are no longer any columns, no longer any any strange figures on our right and left, the walls being nearly smooth; and yet, upon these walls flaring in large letters of vermillion, these legends confront us:

"El Paso Inferno!" (The Infernal Pass.)
"Carmeno del Muerto!" (The Road of the Dead.)

One of these we see on either side, and high above, on the right, there is still another:

"No pueda pasaraqui, senior!"
"Cochise el Apache."

This, being interpreted, is, "You cannot pass here, sir," and the words strike us forcibly, from the fact that we recognize the name that is attached, and we know that he cannot read nor write."

Who in all this vast region does not know that dreaded fiend, Cochise, the Apache?

We shudder as we think of his many brutal acts, of the countless butcheries of this merciless dastard which come up before us. Not only do we deem this retreat of the demon in human shape an appropriate one, but also the legends which he must have forced some unfortunate Mexican captive to paint upon the walls, are well chosen terms for this skull-decorated pass through the gloomy adamantite range.

On and on, along the passage, for at least a quarter of a mile, there is the same symmetry of width, the same height of the gap, with the same bright light from above, the same hot coppery sky almost blinding our eyes. We press forward, and soon spread out to our view is the most beautiful valley we have ever seen, stretching for at least ten miles in our front, and five miles in width.

This vale is a soft emerald, with dense mottos of trees scattered here and there; and below us, in a rocky decline, we can see that ten thousand brilliant flowers peep out from the rich grass.

The central and further portion of the valley is dotted with herds of horses and mules; and, within easy range of vision, are at least three hundred buffalo-skin lodges, showing almost as white as canvas against the green background. These lodges are all pitched in uniform rows, forming regular streets that lead into a grand plaza; in fact, laid out exactly as a Mexican town, and in the middle of the square is a lodge of much larger dimensions.

The streets swarm with squaws and papposes, but the warriors are lounging lazily, smoking cigarritos, as if indifferent to all else.

Such is one of the retreats of the dreaded Apaches, situated in the mountains south of the Rio Pecos, and within a day's ride, as an Indian rides, of Rio Bravo del Norte, or the Rio Grande.

We hasten back through the dark gap, for we have been many hours inspecting it; and, as it is night, we pass the slowly swaying skulls and take up our former position beyond the gap in the crater, but the bright moon now lights up the desolate scene, or we could not hope to escape.

We halt a moment for a farewell view, and the blood in our veins chills with a sudden dread, for, through the tremendous rock basin shoots a piercing, terrible shriek, which echoes from peak to peak, and from chasm to chasm.

We gaze in alarm, and, guided by the sound, we discover a woman, mounted on a black, foam-flecked mustang, winding rapidly among the rocks, showing a perfect knowledge of the way.

The hair of the woman is long and black, and it flies in tangled masses behind her; while upon her head is a crown-like fillet, made up of gay feathers, now crumpled and broken. She is clad in a suit of beaded buckskin, that is evidently of Indian make. We can see that she is armed with bowie and revolver, and that her saddle and bridle are such as are used by Texans.

Strange sights we have seen in the Pass, but this is stranger still. This woman who acts like a maniac, her eyes blazing like coals of fire, clasps in her arms a pale-faced boy, apparently of about five years of age. The face of the woman is Grecian in its type, and shows traces of past beauty. Her skin is tanned and Gipsy-like, but the regularity of features shows that she is not an Indian; although, from her actions, she might reasonably be supposed to be a savage squaw.

On she lashes her panting mustang, until the swaying skulls are just in front of her. Then she halts, and once more a wild, exultant shriek cuts the air, as she points out to the trembling child the terrible emblems of death.

"Boy!" she exclaimed, "you have been cursed by bearing the name of Martinez. It is the name of a dastard, a villain; and it is yours no longer. Your father ruined me, he made me what I am—changed me from a fair, trusting girl, to a maddened hag, and I swore to have my revenge! Henceforth you are to be an Apache, which is far better for you than to be reared among white men, and to be an Apache at heart, as your father is. Never again will you pass beneath that string of skulls, until you are a warrior—until the war-cry shall burst from your lips, and the shrieks of tortured sufferers shall sound as music in your ears. Hear me, ye gods! It is I, Luny Lize—and I swear that no man shall henceforth bear the name of Martinez, to prowl the earth under a deceptive mask. This son of the man who has been my curse, shall wear none, except the war-paint of adoption.

"Come, boy! You are now Muchacho del Noche, Child of the Night, the Apache!"

The latter portion of these remarks was shrieked, rather than spoken; screamed out, wildly and insanely, causing the trembling boy to cower, and hide his little pallid face in his hands. Then, as she ended, the maddened woman swung her quirt hissing through the air, and

about the hams of her mustang, the animal bounding forward, splashing through the shallow stream of water with snorts of fear—on, beneath the pendent skulls, and into the dark depths of "El Paso Inferno," toward the Apache stronghold. The child's destiny is begun.

The sight has awakened our curiosity, our sympathy and wonder, and we travel on, that we may solve the mystery of the mad woman, and the little boy, that she has, in her thirst for vengeance, doomed to a savage life.

CHAPTER IX.

A WEIRD CEREMONY.

WHEN Luny Lize galloped madly up to the retreat of old Cochise, the Apache, every brave in the Indian village sprung from his blanket, for the sentinels, beyond the lodges, having failed to recognize her, had given the alarm yell. No white man, woman, or child, except Luny Lize, had ever passed beneath the string of skulls on a return from the Apache retreat; once through those walls of scoria, they had been doomed to a terrible death. The Pass had been well named, "El Paso Inferno."

When this strange woman first became known to the Apaches, they believed her, from her wild actions, to be gifted with a knowledge and a bravery beyond all other human beings; indeed there was no doubt in the minds of any of them, in regard to her having been invested with supernatural powers by either the Good Spirit, or the Bad Spirit. They were undecided as to which it might be, and it made little difference, for they believed the Bad Spirit to be the more powerful of the two. Their own hellish deeds might well bend them to such a belief.

Luny Lize had discovered the Apache retreat but a short time previous to her entry into the same with "Muchacho del Noche," as she had named the stolen boy of her hated seducer.

She had then made a lasting impression upon the superstitious savages, old Cochise included. All believed that she had communication with the spirits from the other world, and had been given power by them to know and foretell the future.

When she had dashed suddenly into their midst, her tangled hair flying, her eyes blazing with an unnatural light, they were filled with awe; and Lize, in her insane cunning, detected her power, and at once began to act upon it. Even the "Medicine Man," of the tribe saw in her a superior, and felt no jealousy; in fact, they all feared her, and she came and went as she pleased.

In this way she had prepared the Indians for the advent of the boy she intended to abduct from Rancho del Laguna; informing the red-men that she was about to go to the highest peak of the range, and there call upon the Good Spirit and the Bad as well, and whichever first answered her call would send her a boy from the moon, to grow up among the Apaches, and become a chief, and a great adviser in the council lodge. This was two months before she appeared with the boy; and, all this time, the "Muchacho del Noche" had been in the minds, and on the tongues of all in the village, believing that the child would grow up to be the means of stopping the further progress of the "diablo Texanos" toward Apache land.

As Luny Lize dashed down the decline, and into the valley toward the red-men, their alarm subsided as they recognized her, and saw the pale-faced boy in her arms. Then arose a joyous, deafening yell from every throat, and out from the lodges came hordes of squaws of all ages, and swarms of children, who stared in wonder upon the "Big Medicine Squaw," and the expected child of the night in her arms.

At full speed Lize galloped into the plaza, and was at once surrounded by the warriors. Old Cochise and his principal chiefs advanced into the ring, and a wide circle of squaws and papposes spread out beyond, near the lodges.

"Warriors of the Pecos! Braves of the Mountains of Fire!" yelled the madwoman, while the poor boy, whom she held tightly clutched, trembled at the sight of the hideous faces before him. "Luny Lize has come! She told you she would ask the Spirits of the Mountains for a boy chief for the Apaches. Her tongue is not forked! Look! This boy chief is white, for he came from the moon. He is here. Look, warriors of the Pecos, upon Muchacho del Noche!"

As she spoke she raised the trembling boy over her head. This act was greeted by a series of terrific yells, a vocal pandemonium, after which old Cochise advanced to the side of the panting mustang, saying in admiration:

"Big Medicine Squaw is welcome! El Muchacho del Noche is welcome! It is well. The heart of my braves are glad."

With these words he assisted Luny Lize to dismount, and, still holding the boy in her arms, she took up her position in the center of the square, a brave grasping the rein of her mustang and holding him in check.

Then from the old chief's throat burst a peculiar yell that caused every squaw, youth and child not entitled to the privileges of a warrior to fly like frightened sheep back into their va-

rious lodges and to let down the entrance flaps. It mattered not, now that the yell had sounded, how strongly curiosity might rule their brains, not one could peep out upon the proposed ceremonies without incurring the penalty of death, and that at the hand of their nearest relative.

A number of guttural orders, delivered by Old Cochise, in a quick, imperative manner, followed, and then a sudden transformation occurred in the assemblage, each brave daubing two bars of gypsum upon either cheek, and across his brow, causing them to present a most fiendish appearance. Then, drawing up the strings of their paint-bags, they seated themselves around the chiefs, with Luny Lize and her charge, the more celebrated of the braves occupying the inner ring, and so on, according to rank and the number of scalps taken.

"The Big Medicine Squaw has ridden the mustang. El Muchacho del Noche has come to the Apaches on the mustang. The mustang must die. The Good Spirit or the Bad Spirit has sent it, and it must go back. Should an Apache ride the horse he would die. I have spoken."

As old Cochise spoke, he gave a number of signs, and the bridle and saddle were removed from the horse, just as a dozen huge fires burst into blaze beyond the outer circle of braves, casting a strong red light upon the scene. Then, a score of warriors, with bows half-bent, and arrows fitted, stalked in a crescent shaped line, to within thirty feet of the doomed steed.

Old Cochise reversed his lance, held it for an instant a short distance from the ground, and then quickly thrust the point into the earth.

As the lance point penetrated the sward, every bow was bent, and the feathered shafts kissed the cheeks of their owners. Then came one loud scounding twang, as every brave released his bow-string at once, and a score of arrows were half-buried in the side of the horse.

With one loud shriek, the animal reared upon its hind hoofs, stood thus quivering for an instant, and then, with blood spurting from mouth and nostrils, bounded into the air, and fell dead. With a wild cry, Luny Lize, who screamed to be rendered more insane by the scene around her, sprung upon the dead beast, still holding the stolen boy to her breast.

No sooner had the horse fallen, than half-a-dozen medicine men dashed forward, in all the horrid paraphernalia of their vocation, each holding in his left hand a horn filled with teeth, which rattled incessantly in consonance with his movements, and in his right, a round-ended heavy stick, with which, to the same savage accompaniment, he beat upon a rude drum that was attached to his belt.

These medicine men resembled nothing in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, and presented a horrible appearance, as they formed a small circle around horse, woman, and boy. They then prostrated themselves, with their faces buried in the sward, in token of their respect and allegiance to the Big Medicine Squaw and El Muchacho del Noche.

But a moment did they remain in this position. They sprung to their feet, and began a whirling peculiar dance, accompanied by many strange cries, rattling the teeth, and beating on the drums. At length, all being exhausted, they fell forward, with arms and legs outstretched; and this was the signal for every warrior to arise to his feet, and follow old Cochise.

Brandishing knives and hatchets, all now joined in a bewildering dance, during which one circle wheeled one way, and another the opposite, all yelling in consonance with the unearthly performances. At last, a yell from the chief brought every brave to a halt, and every medicine man to his feet at the same time; then the principal chiefs, four in number besides old Cochise, stalked forward, in front of Luny Lize and her charge.

Taking a sharp-pointed arrow, the oldest medicine man proceeded to prick through the skin of the arm of each chief, from which wound oozed a large drop of blood. He then approached the boy, and grasping his hand, drew up the sleeve of his *jaqueta*, baring the little arm; but as he was about to pierce the same, he darted back quickly with an ejaculation of surprise, quite unbecoming in a medicine man, and especially during professional hours.

Luny Lize gazed quickly at the little white arm with a look of exultation and satisfaction upon her face. There on the soft, white, delicate arm of the child, in vermilion, beneath the skin, was the representation of an alligator, precisely like that which she had noticed on the arm of the boy's sister, the unfortunate Dolores.

"El t' tem! El totem!" cried out old Cochise, in a voice of satisfaction. "The Spirit of the Mountains has put his mark on the arm of the boy chief!"

Recovering himself from his surprise, the medicine man pricked the arm of the child, causing him to shrink somewhat, but no dry left his pallid lips. Then with the flat of an arrow-head, the master of ceremonies scraped the drop of blood from the arm of each chief and of the boy, mingling them together. He

then allowed the same to drop upon the child's forehead, while the chiefs cried out in chorus:

"Muchacho del Noche el Apache!"

As these words left their lips, they were repeated and echoed by the vast concourse of braves, and then vells of exultation filled the air as a huge buffalo robe was brought, and spread upon the ground. Luny Lize, with Muchacho del Noche in her arms, was then rolled in the same, and borne by the medicine men into a roomy lodge, where they were laid upon the floor, and the flap let down and secured; a weird chant meanwhile filling the air of the still night, coming from the whole assemblage of warriors.

Then the weird ceremonies of the night closed with a wild ringing whoop. The braves vanished, the fires died down, and all was again silent in that mount-inclosed retreat of ruthless savages.

Thus was little Miguel Martinez, the heir of millions, the child of luxury, transformed into Muchacho del Noche el Apache, and the fearful vengeance of poor Lizzie Ellsworth began to work!

CHAPTER X.

THE STRICKEN THREE.

PEDRO MERCEDO, half-strangled by his sudden and unexpected bath, arose to the surface of the Rio Carmen, sputtering out curses upon the head of the man who had hurled him over the wall of Rancho del Laguna, and upon Francisco Martino as well; vowing to have a most terrible revenge upon both.

With some difficulty he succeeded in reaching *terra firma*, but not before he had been carried by the current into the Laguna.

He had caught a glimpse of the stranger who had so unceremoniously clutched him, and knew him to be an Americano, but he had never before seen him, and therefore was puzzled to know what interest the man could have in either of the parties concerned in the struggle.

The man was none other than Frontier Frank, who had come to Rancho del Laguna to ascertain if all was well with Marietta, the daughter of poor Lizzie Ellsworth. She was now almost the image of her unhappy mother, as the latter had appeared when the scout first met and loved her, at Fort Davis.

The visits of both Frank and Luny Lize had been frequent, but at no time had they been seen by any of the people at the hacienda.

No sooner had the scout hurled Pedro over the wall, than, seeing that Francisco and Marietta were fully occupied in the care of Celeste, he made his way, unperceived, out at the gate that led to the boats, and through which the *aguador* had passed but a short time previous.

As Frank retired within the timber he was brought to a sudden halt, by hearing a voice in front of him; and, peering through the bushes, he discovered Pedro, who sat dripping with water upon the bank of the Laguna, having just dragged his exhausted frame to dry land.

Overhearing the threats and curses of the Castilian, the scout again sprung forward, and before Pedro was aware, he found himself again battling for life in the waters of the Laguna. He then proceeded through the timber, but he had gone only a few paces before he came upon the body of a man, with a terrible knife wound in the breast, showing plainly that murder had been committed. The body was still warm, and, with the exception of a breech-cloth, was almost naked. At once it flashed through the mind of the scout that the *aguador* of Rancho del Laguna lay before him; indeed a second look at the face of the peon convinced him of the fact.

The question now was, who had killed him, and assumed his disguise in order to enter the garden? It was evident to Frank that the man who had brought the water to Marietta must be the murderer, and a spy.

The crime could not have been committed for any vengeful purpose. This looked suspicious, and seemed to point to an attack on Rancho del Laguna; and if so, it was his duty to investigate, and see that no harm came to Marietta, which was one great object of his life.

The discovery of the corpse drove all thoughts of Pedro Mercedo from Frank's mind, and he at once returned to the gardens by way of the walled passage that led to the boats. Entering the inclosure, the scout climbed into the magnolia in which he had before concealed himself; but there was now no one in the garden, or if there was, he was securely hidden in the shrubbery.

Gaining a higher position in the tree, the scout looked in the direction of the lagoon, when a startling sight met his eye.

On the opposite bank of Laguna de los Patos, at a point where the Rio Carmen entered it, stood the man he had thrown over the wall. He was dripping with water, and pale as death, his white teeth gleaming from his tightly-drawn lips, and his eyes blazing with fury, while he shook his clinched fist toward Rancho del Laguna.

Just in the rear, not ten paces from the white man, swam an Indian in long sweeping strokes, his eyes glittering wildly. And as the scout gazed upon him, he discovered that, in some

places, the paint had been washed away, showing a white skin that was unmistakable.

Frontier Frank was dumfounded, and his leveled revolver was depressed while he gazed at the life and death race.

He knew not whether to shoot the mysterious man, who had appeared at Rancho del Laguna as an *aguador*, or to allow him, whoever he might be, to kill Pedro Mercedo.

There was something in the face of the man that seemed familiar—something that warned him not to shoot—but this was so vague and unreliable that when he again bent his gaze upon the terror-stricken face of Pedro, the scout, filled with pity, again brought his revolver to bear, although the head of the pursuer was in a line with that of the pursued, compelling a most circumspect shot if he would avoid hitting the young Castilian.

But now the swimmers reached the shore, and came more plainly into view, enabling Frank to read each expression of feature of the seeming Indian.

Another discovery he now made, which was that the eyes of the pursuer were not black, but of a blue shade, though this did not change in the least their murderous expression.

Turning his head with a quick nervous motion, Pedro gave a piercing shriek of hopeless despair as he saw the murder-stamped face of his pursuer just behind him.

Frank saw that if he would save the life of the young man he must act promptly, and he glanced quickly over the sights of his revolver. But as his finger was about to press the trigger, to his great astonishment the disguised man was raised bodily from the water into the air, and fell backward, his face stamped with terror.

The revolver of the scout dropped once more to his side, and his strong frame trembled like an aspen, for, as the arms of the man were thrown upward, upon one of them, near the shoulder, in glaring vermilion, was the life-like figure of an alligator. Then, as the stranger sunk in the bubbling waters, the head of a huge alligator was thrust above the surface of the *laguna*, explaining the sudden release of Pedro Mercedo from certain death.

A fitting glance Frank again caught of an arm bearing the tell-tale *totem*, the hand being clenched as if to strike a blow; and then he recalled the fact that the swimmer had lost his knife when he had been thrown upward by the huge saurian. All was now plain.

The stranger, who had slain the *aguador*, and entered the gardens of Rancho del Laguna, was none other than the boy Luny Lize had stolen from Don Miguel Martinez, and doomed to be reared as an Apache brave.

He had probably been sent out as a spy to trace out a favorable course for a raiding war-party, and to prove, by the number of scalps he might take, if he was worthy of forming one in the number of braves in the proposed foray—probably his first war-path.

By accident—it could not be otherwise—he had struck the *laguna*, and discovered the hacienda of his own father, his own home by right; but he was totally ignorant of the fact, and of the place of his birth, and of his parentage.

As the thought of all this came into the scout's mind, he dropped his revolver, tore off his *jaqueta*, and, drawing his bowie, plunged into the *laguna*, swimming rapidly toward the spot where the waters were now being tossed and thrashed into foam and spray.

Right into the midst of the tumult, the tail of the huge reptile striking, every now and then, the surface of the water with terrific force, dashed Frontier Frank, and was soon lost to view.

Only for a few moments did the commotion last. The pearly drops were mingled with crimson, and then the air became clear, and the point of conflict was open, disclosing a strange scene, and one terrible to look upon.

An immense alligator, at least fourteen feet in length, lay floating upon the water; and resting one hand upon it, and supporting by the other the bruised and senseless body of the much-wronged victim of Luny Lize's revenge, was the scout, Frontier Frank.

Only for an instant did he keep this position; for, relinquishing his hold on the alligator, he swam slowly, and with evident weakness, toward the bank, still supporting the man he had saved from a terrible death. Reaching the shore, he dragged the seeming Indian up the bank, and laid him by the apparently dead body of Pedro Mercedo.

Then, as Frank stood gazing down upon the two men, one of whom had so recently been filled with murderous intent toward the other, and both of whom now lay side by side—one, ghastly as a corpse, the other, blood-stained—both silent, their glassy eyes sightless; both motionless as death itself—as the scout thus stood, his tall, strong frame swayed and trembled for a moment, and then he too fell forward, and lay beneath the shades, dead to all sound and sense, by the side of the youth he had saved from the depths of Laguna de los Patos!

A strange trio they were. A Castilian

caballero, dressed in the extreme of dandyism; a buckskin-clad scout, with sun-tanned face; and a young man with hair to his waist, naked, and with his skin stained red, while here and there, where the paint had been rubbed off in the waters, was a patch of white—all three lying side by side, silent, in that lonely wood, their eyes fixed and glassy, and glaring as if dead!

CHAPTER XI.

HORRORS OF THE WOODS.

DON MIGUEL having had some experience with wounds while in the army, did not hesitate to remove the knife from the shoulder of poor Celesta, and to dress the wound; after which restoratives were administered, and the maiden began to revive.

Her eyes at first wandered wistfully about in search of Francisco, thus betraying, in her bewildered state, the secret feelings of her heart.

Marietta was not slow in interpreting this, but she felt no jealousy, for her own heart was as yet untouched. Indeed, she was rather pleased the Don saw nothing of this. His mind was filled with deep concern in regard to the wound Celesta had received, for the weather was hot, and danger of inflammation was probable.

Wishing to ease the mind of her cousin, Marietta said, in a soothing voice:

"Be brave, Carissima, for Francisco rides fast to Carizal for *El Doctorio*, who will be here soon. Does the wound much pain you?"

"Somewhat," was the reply; "but I shall soon feel better. That Pedro Mercedo is a cowardly brute!"

"Tell me about this affair, Marietta," demanded her father, in a stern voice. "I infer that Pedro had the audacity to insult my daughter and niece in their own garden. How was it?"

Marietta related in detail the entire circumstances, not forgetting to mention that a strange man—probably one of the *vagueros*—had hurled Pedro over the wall and into the river.

"That man shall be rewarded," said the Don. "But why did you rush in when they were fighting, Celesta? Why did you not allow Francisco to kill him?"

"Pedro is much larger and stronger than Francisco," replied the senorita, changing color. "I fear now that he will waylay Francisco between the hacienda and Carizal, either going or coming."

"Do not worry," advised Don Miguel. "He is well armed, and is a brave, and noble young man. The saints will protect him. Compose yourself, my dear. Marietta will sit by you, and you will soon be bright and joyous as a bird again. I will now go to the river, and look after that villain, Pedro. He is a good swimmer, and he may be cowardly enough to attempt some vile act of treachery toward us."

"Do not go, father," pleaded Marietta. "Stay with us. You may be assassinated!"

"I fear him not, my daughter," was the reply of Don Miguel. "I shall go armed, and if the wretch should seek to injure me on my own grounds, my peons would cut him in pieces and throw him to the alligators in the *laguna*."

Don Miguel hastily left the apartment, and Celesta closed her eyes to enable her more vividly to recall and speculate upon the circumstances which now filled her with self-condemnation at having, as she feared, betrayed her love for Francisco in so plain a manner, when she had no reason to infer that the young Castilian cared aught for her.

Marietta, now that the excitement was over, seated herself by the bedside of Celesta, and began recalling all that had passed. She was forced to admit that she was responsible for the wound her cousin had received, and she resolved to watch by Celesta day and night, and also to discourage any attentions which Francisco might be disposed to pay to herself.

During her passionate excitement she had not given the *aguador* a second thought; but now the peculiar appearance of the peon began to return most vividly. Upon reproducing the face, features and expression of the man, Marietta was positive that she had never seen him before; certain, indeed, she was that he was not that peon of her father's whose duty lay in that capacity. Here was a mystery; but she resolved to solve it, and to get the assistance of her father in doing so.

And now another thought arose to perplex her. Who was the man who came to their assistance?

A fine-looking man—from the glance she had of him—tall and graceful in his bearing, and with a richly ornamented buckskin suit, and a sombrero with bullion fringe.

The *vagueros* and *buckaros* of the hacienda were all men of small stature, and none could dress in such a costume as this stranger. Besides this, she well knew that none of her father's peons ever carried the arms of the Texans.

But she had not seen the man's face, and could therefore form no definite idea. At last, however, she decided that there were, or had been, those in the gardens who had no right to be

there; and that, very possibly, there was danger threatening all in her father's *casa*.

Fearing, even now, for her father's safety, the young girl dashed from the *casa*, across the *patio*, and through the gardens to the walled passage that led to the *laguna*, at the point where it formed a junction with the Rio Carmen.

Don Miguel, in going out from the *casa*, had questioned the *portero*, who had charge of the *patio*, in regard to what he knew of the recent events in the gardens of the Rancho.

He could gain no intelligence from the old man, although his suspicions were aroused by the statement that the *aguador* had neglected his duty, having filled but one cooler, and since then had failed to put in an appearance.

Much puzzled by this information, Don Miguel hastened on through the gardens; but his surprise and apprehension were doubled, when, upon reaching the log-landing, he discovered the water cask lying half in the *laguna*, and the gourd, with which it was usually filled, near at hand, and crushed to fragments.

Looking around, he saw traces of a recent struggle, and also perceived that the grass and leaves were spattered with blood.

Drawing his pistols, Don Miguel proceeded along the bank of the *laguna*, casting suspicious glances upon all sides, and detecting where what he felt sure was the track of a body which had been dragged into the undergrowth. He now decided that some horrible sight awaited him; but that, which he was destined to discover and gaze upon, was far beyond his conception.

The sun was now sinking, and casting arrows of blood-like light upon the foliage and waters; and as Don Miguel's glance was, for an instant, drawn to the surface of the *laguna*, he saw the carcass of the huge alligator floating upon it. The sight caused him to shudder, as it brought the mark, which he had lately heard, was upon his lost son, to mind.

Proceeding slowly along, his mind gradually becoming calmer, he suddenly broke through a clump of bushes, and came upon, at his very feet, three outstretched, dripping, and blood-stained forms, upon which played a patch of red sunlight, which gave them a still more horrible appearance, as the glassy, upturned eyes reflected the same.

Don Miguel was almost paralyzed, as the fearful sight met his view. His nerveless arms fell to his side, his under jaw dropped loosely, and his eyes became as fixed and devoid of motion as were those of the figures at his feet.

One was white, ghastly white, and evidently a corpse. This he recognized as Pedro Mercedo.

Another was a Texan—so his costume, arms, and features proclaimed—an athletic, symmetrical man, of more than common bight and strength, and having an extremely handsome face.

He was a stranger and a mystery.

And the third.

Don Miguel's eyes protruded in amazement, for the skin of this one was mostly red, but in spots and streaks it showed almost white. It was stained beyond a doubt. The man was disguised as an Indian. No! An Indian he must be—his long hair proved that—in spite of the fairer skin beneath the stains.

But how is this? He wears only a breechcloth! Don Miguel stooped, and felt the flesh of this nondescript, to ascertain if he was dead.

The arm was still warm.

The old Castilian raised it from the ground, and an arrow of sunlight revealed a blood-red and singular-shaped blotch.

Don Miguel's head sunk lower and lower for a few moments; and then he gasped and choked for breath.

There, beneath his eye, upon the arm of a disguised—yes, he must be disguised—long-haired youth, who was, beyond a doubt, a spy and an assassin—there, in vermilion was a well-executed picture of an alligator, undoubtedly pricked into the flesh!

Don Miguel dropped the arm, as if it had been a venomous serpent, and sprang instantly erect; then, with a wild and piercing shriek, he fell forward across the bodies of this strange trio, while, in seeming echo to the soul-wrung shriek of the old Castilian, came another from the landing, cutting the evening air like a knife. Then, rushing through the dense undergrowth, leaving shreds of her garments on every side, her hair flying in the breeze, and her eyes filled with the most terrible apprehension, came Marietta, like a whirlwind.

As the fair girl dashed through the screen of branches and leaves, and the dread and appalling sight met her view—as she saw and recognized the false *aguador*, the strange man in buckskin, and Pedro Mercedo, white and corpse-like, her father stretched across the three—as she saw the stains of blood, and the thought flashed upon her that all were dead, that she was alone in the wood with the corpses of men who had died a violent death, and one of these her much-loved father, she became rigid as a statue, the blood seemed to congeal in her veins, and her heart sprang to her throat, for the moment pulseless.

As she stood thus, incapable of motion or articulation, with all these horrors outspread before her, another appalling object broke the stiff lines of the terrible picture, and drew off her gaze that had previously been too much fixed for her already overtaxed brain.

This dread sight was a moving object, a human being upon hands and knees; none other than the old *aguador*, with a gaping gash in his breast, from which the blood fell fast, pattering upon the dry, dead leaves in his course.

The aged peon was evidently dying, for his whole frame trembled, and it was only by the utmost exertion of his remaining strength that he could crawl slowly along. His filmy eyes were fixed in a horrible stare, as he indirectly caught a view of his young mistress, he being evidently uncertain whether she was of the earth or of heaven.

Only for a moment did the gaze of Marietta fasten upon the dying old *aguador*. It was more of horror than she could bear. The woods of the *laguna* seemed pregnant with death and murder; and, with one agonizing shriek of fear and despair, the poor girl threw up her hands to her forehead, fell backward and shot down the steep bank, disappearing beneath the deep, dark alligator haunts of the *Laguna de los Patos*!

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAGEDY AT THE LAKE.

THE cry of the horrified Marietta struck upon the still ear of Frontier Frank. He opened his eyes, and directly above him he saw the pale, terrified face of the fair maid of the Rancho.

But only for an instant was this presented to his view; for, as has been recorded, Marietta fell back backward into the waters of the lake. There was but a slight splash as she struck the surface, which was, however, sufficient to enable the scout, although his senses were still somewhat blunted, to realize what had occurred; and the knowledge that the beautiful girl had fallen into the water, where she was exposed to the greatest danger, both from the alligators and from drowning, caused him to throw off the deathly faintness that ruled his brain, to arise, and without giving the slightest thought to the silent forms before him, plunge into the *laguna* and dive deep, clutching upon all sides for the garments of Marietta Martinez.

He was forced to rise to the surface without success; when he glanced over the waters in deep concern, expecting to see the slimy head of some hugosaurian awaiting the opportunity to attack him, or with the form of Marietta between its terrible jaws.

Frontier Frank knew that he could not hope to again battle successfully with one of those gigantic lizards; but soon, greatly to his relief, he saw the pale face of the lovely maiden appear above the water, and with a few quick strokes he gained the spot, and clasped Marietta, just as she was again sinking beneath the depths. New life now seemed to be instilled into his frame, and he made a herculean effort to regain the shore with his precious charge, knowing that the commotion he had caused would soon draw the monsters of the *laguna* to his vicinity.

Deciding that it had been the sight of the dead, or apparently dead bodies, that had caused Marietta such a shock; and also knowing that it was a difficult bank at which to land, the scout made for a point at some little distance above. Reaching it, he seated himself, for he was quite weak, and held the young girl in his arms; her wealth of dark hair hanging over his shoulder, and dripping with water.

Twilight now pervaded the prairies, and beneath the timber it was quite dark. Then came the thought of the necessity of proceeding at once to the hacienda, and delivering his charge into the hands of some of the females. This he must do.

But, Marietta might die.

He knew nothing, of the amount of water she might have taken into her lungs.

He knew that a maiden of her years, and reared as she had been, was of a very delicate organization, and the cord between life and death easily snapped asunder. He staggered, therefore, to his feet, taking her in his arms, as a mother would a babe, and then made his way slowly through the wood, and into the gardens.

As he entered the *patio*, the *portero* sprung up in alarm, and filled the air with outcries which brought the old nurse from the bedside of Celesta in wonder and apprehension.

"Lead the way to a chamber, senora!" ordered the scout. "Procure blankets and towels, and use all the means in your power to revive your mistress, who, a short time ago, fell into the *laguna*!"

In the deepest concern, the old woman led Frank into the apartment occupied by the wounded Celesta, in which there was a lounge. On this the scout deposited his fair burden, and turned to leave.

Celesta opened her eyes, and gazed at Frank, and then at Marietta, in the utmost amazement.

"Fear not," said the scout; "your friend will, I trust, soon recover. Excuse me, for I must go, and look after Don Martinez. I hope you are not suffering greatly from your wound."

"Thank you, senor!" said Celesta, much bewildered. "I do not feel much pain; but, may I ask who you are, and how you came to know of it? Tell me, besides, what has happened to my cousin. I cannot understand it."

"I can only reply hastily, that I was an eyewitness of the duello. I am the man who threw Pedro Mercedo over the wall. Senorita Martinez fell into the *laguna*, and I was so fortunate as to save her. Don Martinez is now in a position of peril, so I must beg you to excuse me. My name, however, is Frontier Frank."

With these hurried explanations, the scout left with hasty step, and retraced his way to the bank of the *laguna*, at the point where he had dragged out the young man with the mysterious figure on his arm, and who was in the guise of a peon.

As the reader has no doubt decided, the young stranger who stabbed the old *aguador*, then assumed his disguise, and entered the gardens as a spy, afterward attempting the life of Pedro Mercedo, was none other than Muchacho del Noche, the stolen son of Don Miguel Martinez.

The auspicious manner in which, as a child, he had been introduced to the Apaches by Luny Lize, and which so impressed the superstitious savages, had been greatly in his favor. The present trial of his strategic powers and skill had been voluntary, and considered unnecessary by old Cochise; still, as it was the custom, he was obstinate, and resolved to accept no favors, and this fact caused him to be more respected by the other young braves, as well as by the warriors.

Frontier Frank, when he started up to rescue Marietta from the *laguna*, had unknowingly stepped upon the muscular portion of the arm of Muchacho del Noche, and this served to bring him back to consciousness; but he made not the slightest movement to betray the fact.

He saw the scout plunge into the *laguna*, and knew him to be the man who had saved him from the alligator; and, although he had been reared a savage, he felt a heartfelt gratitude to the unknown Texan, which would last through life.

He was very weak from the loss of blood, and the violent blows he had received; and he sat up with much difficulty, but he felt that the numbness and faintness were gradually leaving him.

A slight movement behind him caused him to turn his head quickly, and the dying *aguador* met his view. This caused all the savage nature of his training to come to the surface. Feeling alarmed that he had not done his work better, he felt for his knife, and found that it was gone.

He then remembered that he had lost it in the *laguna*, and looking about him for a club, he discovered that there were two more apparently dead men, by his side. One he knew to be the man who had insolently ordered him to carry water to the white squaws in the gardens of the *casa*, and whom he had afterward sought to kill and scalp. The other, he knew not.

What his feelings would have been, had he known him to be his own father, who can say.

In the belt of the latter was a knife, which he quickly drew from its scabbard. He then crawled towards the *aguador*, who sat crossing his arms over his breast, and muttering his prayers.

Reaching the dying peon, Muchacho del Noche, with a merciless expression upon his strained face, lifted the knife, and plunged it deep into his side.

A heavy groan, a fall upon the sward, and all was over. Then the Child of the Night proceeded in a dexterous manner, to scalp his first victim. This done, he rested for a time, little thinking that Pedro Mercedo had recovered, and having observed his brutal act, had crawled from view into the dense undergrowth.

Muchacho del Noche was now weak from violent exertion, as well as from having been almost strangled, in fact nearly drowned; but he was conscious that he was now in a very dangerous position, that he must soon, if his first war-path was not to be his last, make a most expeditious retreat. However a longing for trophies of his prowess caused him to creep back to his former position, after the scalps of the two men, whose presence was a mystery to him.

He gained the little clear space, which was but faintly illuminated by the moon, and found to his surprise that but one of them remained.

Determined that the remaining man should not escape him, Muchacho del Noche got astride of the seeming corpse, and placing his hand upon the breast, detected a beating of the heart. The man was alive, but he was for some cause, unconscious; and the wild youth of the mountains quickly raised his knife, the blade still dripping with the blood of the old *aguador*. All his strength was concentrated to plunge the steel into the breast of his intended victim, and his blade had already started on its errand of death, when the sharp report of a revolver awakened the echoes of the timber, and the knife of Muchacho del Noche flew from his hand, struck the water in his rear, and fell into the *laguna*.

With a half smothered cry of rage, mingled with apprehension, the youth, who had so

narrowly escaped being a parricide, sprung into the dark shades, and disappeared in the undergrowth. At the same time: Frontier Frank stepped quickly from the gloom, his still smoking revolver in his hand, and from his lips sprung the words:

"Thank God! At least I saved him from that!"

The scout then grasped Don Miguel in his strong arms, and proceeded again toward the *casa*, where he soon arrived; not being aware that the baleful eyes of Pedro Mercedo had watched his every movement from the hiding-place, where he lay filled with wonder that the burly Texan had spared the life of an Apache.

As soon as Frank reached the *patio*, he was met by the *portero*, who was rejoiced to see that his master had been saved from he knew not what; and he eagerly led the way into the *casa*.

"Senor will bring Don Miguel in," he said. "Senorita Martinez has recovered, and is greatly concerned in regard to her father, as is also the Senorita Carasco."

Frontier Frank found that the *portero* had spoken the truth, for as he entered he saw that Marietta was pacing the apartment wildly.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she cried, as she saw the pale face of her father. "Tell me, senor—tell me that he is not dead!"

A moan of anguish broke from Celesta, who now strove to assume a sitting posture, but who was gently prevailed on by the old nurse to lie down.

"*Mil gracias, Salvador mio!*" exclaimed Marietta, as Frank gently placed Don Miguel upon the lounge. Then looking into the honest, handsome face of the scout, she asked in an excited tone:

"Who, in the name of *Santos Tadas*, was the man whom I saw apparently dead by the side of my father? He looked like an Indian. I saw our old *aguador* too, bleeding from a wound in his breast. Yes, and that wretch, Pedro Mercedo, lay dead at my feet. And then I must have fainted. What does it all mean?"

"Excuse my wild questioning, senor. I know that I must have fallen into the *laguna*, and that you saved me from a watery grave, and perhaps from the jaws of the alligators. I do not ask you to reveal your name, unless you wish to do so; but I should be made happy, if in my prayers I could call down blessings upon your head. You have saved the life of my father also, and our eternal gratitude is yours. Do not leave this roof, I pray you; but remain and protect us from the mysterious foes that I feel must be about us. Celesta tells me that it was you who threw the miscreant, Pedro Mercedo over the wall, thus saving us from further bloodshed. Surely you were sent to us by the *Madre de Dios*, and her blessing will be upon you."

Marietta was now so excited that she seemed to forget the presence of her insensible father; all her soul was in her eyes as she stood regarding the scout while she addressed him.

Frontier Frank had removed his sombrero, and stepped to the middle of the room, his wet garments clinging to him. There he stood erect, while he drank in the words of the fair girl—she a very princess in form, beauty, and speech; he a lion-hearted prince of the prairies, with a winning ease of manner, and beauty of face, that might be looked for in vain among a regiment of men.

One glance he gave at Celesta, filled with deep sympathy; one at Don Miguel, whom he saw about recovering his consciousness; then, with a half-worshipping look at the fair girl before him, he answered her:

"Senorita Martinez, I must beg you to excuse my explaining everything of the happenings of this strange night that have come under my personal observation, until I have further investigated them. Danger may still lurk in the woods of *Laguna de los Patos*, and if so, I must ferret it out. Your profuse thanks are uncalled for, as I would have been less than a man, had I acted otherwise. I see that Don Miguel is reviving. Senorita, my name is Frontier Frank—a *sobriquet*, I admit; but it has been put upon me for no disgrace—my real name must remain for the present, as it has been for years, unknown to all. I go now to look up the sign of foes to you and yours: but we shall, I trust, meet again. *Adios!*"

So saying, the scout strode toward the *puerta*, but before he reached it, Marietta rushed to his side and clasped his hand in both of her delicate palms, saying in an earnest, pleading voice as she looked steadily into his eyes:

"Promise me—promise me, Senor Frank, that you will not leave *Laguna de los Patos* without seeing us again!"

"Senorita Marietta," returned the scout, as he trembled with emotion, "I can promise nothing. I am forced to be guided in this, as in everything, by such circumstances as may seem to direct me toward the safety or protection of those who may need my services. If danger, as I fear, lurks in the vicinity of this hacienda, I shall remain; if I find that it does not, I must ride fast toward the *Rio Grande*. But, God willing, Senorita Martinez will again meet Frontier Frank."

With these words, the scout passed out the

part, leaving Marietta standing like a statue, half-dazed, and with admiration in every expression of her face; while Celesta, from her couch, gazed upon her cousin in the utmost astonishment.

CHAPTER XIII.

CORRALED.

WHEN Don Miguel recovered his senses, he was at first bewildered, and knew not where he was. The experience of the evening seemed more like a horrid nightmare than a reality; but the anxious faces of his daughter and niece recalled to his mind the first of those tragic events, after which the others loomed up rapidly before him. He knew that all which was now pictured to him, so vividly and minutely, was but too true.

He felt positive that the figure of an alligator was marked upon the arm of the son, that had been stolen from him when but a child, and he had discovered, on the shore of the lake, the body of a young man, in the disguise of an Indian, and who was about the age his son would be, if alive; and this youth had the same unmistakable mark upon his arm.

Whoever he might be, he was evidently a spy and a murderer, and wore his hair to his waist like a savage.

"Holy Mother!"

Don Miguel had closed his eyes, that he might the better collect his thoughts, as he realized where he was, and the pious ejaculation was but whispered.

Could it be possible that Elizabeth Ellsworth had stolen his boy, and induced the Apaches to adopt him, thus, in revenge for her fearful wrongs, condemning young Miguel to a savage life—perhaps rearing him to murder his own father?

The mere thought of such a thing was maddening.

If this disguised youth was his lost son, what could have brought him to Rancho del Laguna, if he was not aware of his parentage? It did not seem possible that he could have been at the laguna by accident; indeed, he quite believed that the old *aguador* had been stabbed by him, and then dragged into the bushes. Was Pedro Mercedo dead, and who could have killed him? Who was that Texan, and in what manner had he too lost his life? Had the strange youth who, in spite of every longing to be able to doubt it, he felt convinced was his lost son—had he slain the *aguador*, and then Pedro and the Texan, himself falling at last, from the wounds received in the terrible conflict? Think, reason, as he would, Don Miguel could not, with any plausibility, unravel the dread mystery. Then, too, how came he back to the *casa*? He knew that none of his people were aware of the course he had taken, nor were at the spot at which he had discovered the bodies, and where he had fallen, benumbed with horror at the dread sight before him, and the appalling thought that had flashed upon him, as the strange mark met his view—the figure which had haunted him day and night since Padre Jose had disclosed the secret—consequently he was greatly puzzled to know in what manner and by whom he had been brought home from the bank of the laguna.

Marietta and the nurse had been conversing in subdued whispers since the departure of the scout, and the discovery that Don Miguel showed signs of recovery; and he now opened his eyes, this time filled with a more natural and intelligent expression.

"Blessed be God!" exclaimed Marietta, in her intense relief and thankfulness. "Father, you are becoming better. You will soon be well. What have we done that our minds should be so tortured? Rancho del Laguna is surrounded by mystery and murder."

"What know you of this night's doings?" cried out Don Miguel, quickly, as he arose to a sitting posture, fearful that the discovery he had made had become known to others, although a second thought would have caused him to decide that, should such be the case, there were none who would notice or suspect any connection between the disguised Indian and himself, from having noticed the design upon the young man's arm.

Marietta hesitated in replying, and the old man added showing still greater anxiety:

"When my senses left me, I was in the wood, near the bank of the laguna. How came I here?"

"You, father, as well as myself, were conveyed to the *casa* by an Americano—a scout, named Frontier Frank. He is a good and noble man, and he saved my life, and perhaps yours."

Don Miguel gazed into his daughter's face in great wonder and amazement, as he again inquired:

"Saved our lives, did you say, Marietta?"

"He saved me from the laguna. I should have been drowned, had it not been for him, father!"

As the young girl spoke, Don Miguel turned pale, and began to tremble violently.

"My father!" she cried out in deep concern; "you had better not talk. I fear you have received a shock that will cause you to be very ill, if you are not kept quiet. Let us drop

the subject of this night's mysterious events until you are feeling stronger."

"I insist that you explain yourself, Marietta," he said. "I left you here with Celesta, and you now inform me that your life was saved by a stranger scout. I am quite in the dark as to your meaning, my child. Relieve my mind at once!"

Marietta then detailed her movements in search of him, and the strange sights that she had seen at the laguna, which had so appalled her as to cause her to fall senseless into the water, and her having been brought to the *casa* by Frontier Frank, whom she had previously seen lying, apparently dead by the side of the others. She told also of the departure of the Texan, in search of Don Miguel, and of his return with him in an insensible condition.

The old Castilian was dumfounded, and asked: "Where is this scout you speak of? He must be rewarded. I trust you have not allowed him to depart?"

"I endeavored to detain him," was the reply; "but he felt it his duty to return to the lake, and ascertain something in regard to the senseless men that had been left there. It was he who hurled Pedro Mercedo over the garden wall, thus probably preventing the dastardly wretch from murdering Francisco; as I know that he was plotting a desperate hand-to-hand encounter, in which he knew he would be the victor in the fight."

"And, father," she continued, after hesitating for a moment, during which she reasoned that she ought to confide all that she knew or suspected, that bore on the general weal of all at Rancho del Laguna, "I must tell you that our old *aguador* was certainly stabbed by the Indian who assumed the place of his victim and entered our gardens. Not until the excitement, originating from the duello and the accident to Celesta, had ceased to render me almost insane with grief and concern, did I recall the form, features, age and bearing of the *aguador* who brought us water at the command of Pedro Mercedo, and then I felt sure that he did not belong to our hacienda. Then, when I saw the same man, his sombrero gone, and his long hair hanging loosely about his head, with here and there light marks, as though the color or dye had been rubbed off his skin, I was startled, for the seeming *aguador* seemed to be both a white man and an Indian. I also then recognized the clothing of the scout who had thrown Pedro over the wall, and I felt sure that he could have no connection with this now prostrate and apparently dead mysterious being. The little reasoning that I had the power to use led me to the conclusion that Pedro had killed the Texan for having thrown him over the wall of the garden, and then had himself been slain by the one who had stabbed the *aguador*. Then you had appeared upon the scene and had shot the murderer; but, before dying, he had given you your death-wound. While these thoughts were flashing through my brain, the poor old *aguador* appeared, crawling upon his hands and knees, a terrible gash in his breast, from which blood was dripping, and casting such glances from his death-dimming eyes as filled me with horror. I lost all consciousness, and I suppose fell into the laguna."

"Holy Mother! I pray that never again, while I live, will I be forced to pass such another night of dread and terrible experiences. Everything has been not only mysterious, but bewildering and terrible."

Don Miguel listened with torturing anxiety to all Marietta's explanations, being most terribly agitated when she spoke in regard to the strange young man, who was evidently in disguise, fearing each moment that his daughter would mention the mysterious mark upon the arm of the nondescript. When she ended he heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Then you saw and recognized our poor old *aguador*?" he questioned.

"Most certainly, and he was nearly dead. But who do you suppose, father, could have laid Pedro Mercedo and the scout low?"

"I cannot say, my daughter. That is another mystery; but doubtless this Texan, who has proved himself a friend, even to the extent of risking his own life, could explain everything. He must be found, however; otherwise I fear he will come to harm. And, too, the body of Pedro must be brought in and forwarded to his family at Carizal. The cause of his death must be ascertained and explained to his relatives, and every precaution taken toward making our home safe from attack; for I am very fearful that the spy, who has proved himself so cunning, expert and daring, has been sent here for information in regard to the state of our defenses and the probable amount of plunder to be obtained in a foray up the Rio Carmon. Please hasten to the bedside of Celesta, my dear, and ascertain if she is comfortable. I fear that she will feel she has been neglected, poor girl! It has been a very unfortunate affair in every way, and seems to have been but the initiation of a series of terrible happenings. I trust that all may end well."

So saying, Don Miguel arose, and passed out of the *casa*, retracing his steps to the bank of the laguna, where lay, as he supposed, the dead

body of Pedro Mercedo, and the still living form of the man who he felt assured was his own son.

On through the dark timber the old Castilian walked rapidly, heedless of any immediate coming evil, when suddenly a rushing sound through the wood in front of him caused him to halt, and then something from the rear came upon him with the rapidity of lightning, and he fell to the earth.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WILD CHARGE.

STARTLING, and indeed alarming, as had been the experience of Frontier Frank since his arrival at Lake Ranch, he was in no way dismayed, or inclined to retrace his steps in the direction of the Rio Grande. On the contrary, he felt thankful that he had come at such a critical time, and had been enabled to be of service to the daughter of poor Luny Lize. The devoted love that he had entertained for the mother, but which had been calmed down by grief and misfortune into a firm friendship, now sprung again into life, having the daughter for its object, and was stronger far than had been his passion when Elizabeth Ellsworth ruled his heart and life.

The scene he had witnessed previous to the conflict between Pedro and Francisco, had proved to the scout that Marietta cared not for either.

The appearance of the lost son of Don Miguel as an Apache brave, caused Frank the most intense amazement, notwithstanding that he was by no means unprepared for something of the kind. He had suspected that the mad thirst for revenge entertained by Luny Lize, would lead her to some such mode of vengeance; still, he had hoped she would not prove herself quite so fiendish and unjust, and he was forced now to think less of her.

The scout was now positive that, not only was the stolen boy an Apache-reared brave, but that he was one who, if he lived, would rise to great distinction in the tribe. Not only this, but he concluded that it would be almost impossible to wean the youth from the wild, savage life to which he had been brought up. But for all this, Frank resolved that he would work to that end, and devote his life to the undoing of the great wrong done to both the legal heirs of the Rancho del Laguna. At the same time, he vowed that Marietta should never know the secret of her birth, and that she should share the estate at the death of Don Miguel, as she was truly his daughter.

He had saved the life of Pedro Mercedo, but he was none the less resolved that the latter should die if he gave any sign of meditating wrong to the *senoritas*, or to Francisco, who had befriended them.

He thought now of the events of the past day with real satisfaction; although not for a moment did he entertain the thought that Marietta would ever be ought to him except a friend.

The blighting disappointment he had suffered in the case of the unhappy Lizzie Ellsworth, had nearly broken his heart, and rendered him hopeless, as far as any thought of earthly happiness was concerned—so hopeless that there was not now a thought that his new-born love for poor Lizzie's child could ever be reciprocated.

As he left the presence of Marietta, he strode out into the *patio*, gazed up into the face of the bright moon, and vowed that, not only by his devotion to her interests and happiness, but by strict allegiance to her service in every danger, would he act the love which he must never express in words for Marietta Martinez.

Frank felt sure that the vindictive Apache—... and you would not leave the timber of the laguna while there was the slightest chance left for securing a scalp. He now recalled the fact that Luny Lize, when riding exultantly toward the Rio Grande with the stolen boy, declared that his name should be Muchacho del Noche, or "Boy of the Night," and he now resolved to bear this in mind.

He knew that Muchacho, before being knocked senseless from a blow of the tail of the alligator while in the water, had observed him coming to his rescue; and that the latter must also have known having been saved by him—not only so, but the scout had no doubt that the youth knew who it was that fired the revolver, and thus prevented his murdering Don Martinez. This convinced Frank that—bad though Muchacho must be—he would not seek to harm him; and it explained the strange look that rested on the youth's face when he ran into the bushes, evidently not wishing to come in deadly conflict with the man who had saved his life, and who, had he so wished, could have very easily taken it.

The disappearance of Pedro Mercedo puzzled the scout, who had thought the Castilian too much broken up to escape; and he wished to ascertain, if possible, the whereabouts of Pedro, equally as much as of Muchacho del Noche, both of whom were dangerous persons to be allowed near the Rancho del Laguna; fearing, most of all, that evil designs would be meditated by Pedro against Francisco, as the latter returned from Carizal.

When Pedro Mercedo sneaked into the bushes,

he was almost overcome with terror; for, the mysterious Indian who had so recently sought his life was yet alive, and evidently bent on murder.

With pallid face and quaking form, the cowardly Castilian watched Muchacho, as he finished the butchery of the old *aguador*, and saw him then crawl back toward his covert.

Pedro was incapable of movement, but, when he saw the murderer next standing over Don Miguel, who had thus far escaped his notice, he was filled with fiendish joy, for, if the old Don was out of the way, he felt sure that he could concoct some plan to abduct Marietta, force her to wed him, and then humble her, as she had humiliated him. He could scarce repress a yell of exultation, but his feelings changed when the report of the scout's pistol rung out on the night air, and the knife of the assassin flew into the *laguna*. At first Pedro thought the shot had been fired at himself; but, when he witnessed the flight of Muchacho, and saw the removal of Don Miguel by Frontier Frank, he was filled with fury, for he recognized in the latter the man who had hurled him over the garden wall.

For a time he sat thinking over the situation, but could see no prospect for immediate revenge, and he decided to return home.

No sooner did this thought enter his mind, than he bethought him of the fact that he had given Celesta a bad wound, as the latter had rushed in between Francisco and himself. He then decided that there must have been a necessity for a doctor, and, as there was not a man of that profession nearer than Carizal, some one must have been instantly dispatched.

Who was there to undertake such a mission? Certainly none other than his rival, Francisco Martino.

Satisfied of this, Pedro's face contorted with rage at the very thought, and he resolved to crawl up to the river bottom above the landing, and make an attempt to avenge the insults he had received at the hands of Francisco, and also to kill the strange scout, if an opportunity presented itself. Jerking a long, gleaming stiletto from the inner portion of his boot-leg, he stealthily made his way through the wood, at times stopping and listening intently.

Passing the landing, he climbed up into a tree, the branches of which overhung the trail that led to Carizal. Here the dastard waited.

It was just at the moment that Frontier Frank left the gardens that he observed Pedro's movements, although the latter was not aware of the presence of any human being in this vicinity.

Frank was not slow in forming his conclusions. He knew that the cunning Castilian, upon regaining his balance of mind, would infer that his late antagonist would soon be returning from Carizal. He knew that Pedro was filled with murderous hate toward Francisco, and that, in his cowardly way, he would hesitate at nothing. He therefore followed stealthily on the course that Pedro had taken; but the movements of the latter had been rapid, and he had gained his position just as Francisco, his horse panting laboriously, came in sight.

Clutching his stiletto firmly, Pedro made a flying leap upon the horse, in the rear of Francisco, whom he grasped with his left hand by the collar and strove to plunge the knife into his back. But the horse starting violently, caused his aim to be misdirected, and the steel was struck into Francisco's shoulder, striking the bone, and glancing downward.

Francisco gave a cry of affright, which caught the ear of the scout, and also of the doctor who came riding up. Frank bounded to the rescue, while the doctor drove spurs, and dashed toward the hacienda.

The scout arrived just in time to jerk the cowardly assassin to the earth, and then to receive the fainting form of Francisco in his arms. Pedro sprang to his feet and darted into the undergrowth before Frank, burdened as he was, could prevent him. Doubly furious, the wretch now rushed toward the *casa*, intending to climb into a tree and see what would transpire inside the walls after the return of the scout.

As he gained the vicinity of the large gate at the front of the *casa*, he saw that it was open, a horse was standing near, and the mysterious Apache was just in the act of scalping the gatekeeper, whom he had evidently just killed.

Filled with horror, Pedro dashed into the shrubbery, and ran along the side wall, climbing a tree that commanded a view of the *patio*. But a moment was he in this position when he saw the doctor approach and pause for a moment to speak to Don Martinez, who came out from the *casa* with the evident intention of passing down through the gardens in the direction of the landing.

A hellish plot entered Pedro's head, attended with much danger to himself; but, furious as he was, he would run any risk for revenge.

Slipping down the tree, he returned quickly to the bushes near the gate, where he saw that the Apache was now securing the weapons of his victim to his own saddle.

Drawing himself, Pedro dashed into full view,

and ran through the gateway, glancing meanwhile over his shoulder.

The plan worked. Muchacho del Noche, recognizing him as the man he had been after in the *laguna*, and eager for more trophies of his prowess, sprang upon his mustang, and rode after him.

On like a deer, bounded the young *caballero*, urged less by his terror than a mad thirst for revenge; past the wing of the *casa*, and around the same to a clear space between the *patio* and the gardens. Thence, dashing among the dense timber, he came suddenly upon Don Miguel Martinez.

Right past the old Castilian dashed Pedro; when, whirling around from the clear space we have mentioned, as if to head him off, bounded Muchacho, who, seeing his foe disappear in the shrubbery, and observing Don Miguel, over whose breast his knife had but recently been poised, only to be shot from his hand by the Texan, he rode suddenly against him. The shock threw Don Miguel to the earth; the wild youth, leaning over, grasped the old man by the belt, jerking his mustang to a halt as he did so, and then, by a great exertion of strength, dragged the lord of the manor up into his arms. Then, whirling his steel, and urging the animal at headlong gallop in retreat toward the gate, he filled the air with his exultant whoops.

When Don Martinez was thus jerked upon the mustang, he began to realize what it meant, and gave a piercing scream of horror, for he knew that he was in the power of the mysterious Indian-like being whom he had seen at the bank of the *laguna*—the same, upon whose arm he had discovered the strange mark of an alligator indelibly impressed, which mark proved him to be his son—a son, who would now, in all probability, be his murderer!

On, over the moonlit plain toward the Rio Grande, dashed Muchacho del Noche, holding tightly in his arms his own father, whom in his mind he had already condemned to die by torture; little thinking of such a thing as relationship, ignorant of everything, caring for nothing but to satisfy the thirst for blood, and the longing for scalps—trophies that would prove him, although so young, a fit companion for old Cochise and his chiefs, in the council, and on the trail!

On, with exultant yells and whoops of defiance, bounded the Child of the Night, and his captive, Don Miguel Martinez—sight that would have gladdened the heart of Liny Liza, and have crushed prostrate, at the same time, her daughter, poor Marietta!

CHAPTER XV.

FRONTIER FRANK TO THE RESCUE.

TURNING quickly at the sound of the wild whoops of Muchacho del Noche, the doctor saw the man whom he had observed going to the assistance of Francisco when he had been attacked.

This man, as the reader knows, was Frontier Frank; and in his arms was now the form of Francisco. As he came in view of the side drive, the scout discovered Marietta prone upon the ground, her pale face seeming more like that of a corpse, being lit up by the moon.

For a moment the brave Texan stood, bereft of all power to move or speak, his muscular arms tightened about the form of the young Castilian he had just saved from being assassinated.

Frank had heard the rush of some one through the shrubbery, but supposed it to have been one of the peons sent to aid Francisco Martino.

As the doctor turned about, the scout dropped the senseless form of Francisco, and ran forward, lifting Marietta from the earth, and holding her tenderly in his arms. He felt sure that the maiden had only fainted; and, with stern face, he turned to the doctor and demanded, in a quick-spoken, imperative voice:

"What in the fiend's name has occurred now? Why do you stand there, like an idiot, and allow a senseless lady to lie thus, without assisting her?"

"Easy, senor," reasoned the doctor. "I confess that my action, or rather want of action, may seem inhuman; but I have been too confused to act. Here is the case of Francisco Martino, who has been foully dealt with by some one. I see that you, noble sir, have saved him."

"I care not to hear of things I know more about than you do," was the impatient reply. "Tell me the occasion of this lady's sad condition?"

"Do not worry," responded the doctor, calmly. "The senorita is not at all injured. She has but fainted, but with good cause. An Indian has but just galloped through, and carried away Don Miguel."

"Don Miguel? Good Heavens!"

As Frank thus exclaimed, he pressed his disengaged hand wildly to his forehead.

Don Miguel was in the power of his own son; but that son was an Apache by training, brave, bloodthirsty, and merciless, knowing nothing of the relationship he bore toward his captive.

Once, during this night, had the scout saved the old Castilian from being slain and scalped by Muchacho del Noche, and now there was but

slight hope of overtaking them, and again preventing the fearful parricide, the mere thought of which caused Frontier Frank to shudder.

One thing was certain—he must follow the savage youth, and rescue Don Miguel at all hazards. With this thought, Frank was about to carry Marietta to Celesta's apartment, when a cry from the doctor caused him to halt.

"Senor, if you go with still further evidences of danger and death to that chamber, I will not answer for the life of Senorita Carasco. She is even now greatly excited and feverish."

"Bring Francisco into the *casa* then! Attend at once to this young lady; and after that, you can dress his wounds. Then tell him what has happened. He must take charge of the *rancho*, while I hasten to rescue its master. There is no time for idle words. You can use your judgment in regard to explanations."

Thus spoke the scout in hasty, but firm tones. He then dashed into the *casa*, depositing Marietta upon a couch in a room adjoining that of Celesta. Gazing for a moment upon the still face of the beautiful girl, Frank turned, and darted from the apartment, almost overturning the doctor in his mad haste. He then bounded through the gardens, and up the shore of the lake, where, at the distance of half a mile from the *casa*, he entered a dense thicket.

Here he gave a low whistle, which was answered by a whinny of pleasure from his horse, a noble black steed. Quickly he was astride of the beast, having first secured his Sharp's rifle, which he had previously secreted in a hollow tree, and dashed out from the timber, over the moonlit plain, toward the Rio Grande. His eagle glance could discover but one slight break in the vast, far-spreading plain; but well he knew that, mere speck though it seemed, it was the fast flying mustang of Muchacho del Noche, and in his mind he could now see Don Miguel Martinez writhing and shrieking at the torture-stake, in the secret vale of old Cochise the Apache.

The securing of a captive, and taking the same from Mexico to the Apache mountains by a young brave, and alone, was a feat that would put an eagle-feather in the head dress of Muchacho to say nothing of the scalps that now hung at his belt. The scout knew that it could only have been chance that led the youth to his old home, and enabled him thus to become the captor of his own father.

That Don Miguel was doomed to torture was certain, and Frank had but little hope of saving him, by overtaking, or cutting off Muchacho del Noche from the mountains, after the latter had once crossed the Rio Grande.

All his plans were of cunningly outwitting the young brave by some strategic move.

Most unmercifully did the young brave lash his doubly laden mustang, while on, over the boundless plain, they sped; the keen eyes of the youth sweeping far ahead, to his right and to his left, and lastly behind him, when he discovered that a lone horseman pursued him.

Instantly deciding that this could be no other than the Texan whom he had seen at the *laguna*, the young brave became deeply concerned; for, savage though he had been reared, he could not take the life of the man who had undoubtedly saved his own.

Feeling sure that the scout was better mounted than himself, and taking into consideration the double load that he was to carry, the wild youth decided that he would run his horse to death in order to reach the Rio Grande before his pursuer could overtake him. Once there, he could secrete himself and his captive, thus evading the risk of losing the latter, and perhaps of being himself captured; for he knew that the Texan was a cunning and skillful warrior, and of unusual strength.

On went Frank, his eyes fixed upon the dark spot, which, though far ahead, he was resolved to come up with. Slightly bent forward, and with his rifle thrown into the hollow of his left arm, the scout gave loose rein, and only by a cheering word now and then did he seek to hasten the steed onward. Horse and rider seemed created for each other, making as they did a splendid picture, both models of grace and strength.

And thus we will leave two of our principal characters, the scout gaining slowly but surely upon Muchacho del Noche; the latter, however, confident that by sacrificing the life of his mustang in the terrible race he would reach the Rio Grande and evade capture.

After the departure of Frontier Frank, the doctor obeyed his orders to the letter, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the eyes of Marietta open.

She sat up in a most bewildered state of mind, and gazed around her in horror; for in his hurry and excitement, the doctor had brought Francisco into the same room in which Marietta was. The young Castilian had recovered, but was weak and almost speechless from loss of blood.

"*Madre de Dios!*" the poor girl exclaimed; "what a night of woe and blood! Will this never end? Oh, my poor brain! I shall go mad! The very air is filled with murder!"

Slowly collecting her scattered senses, Marietta now remembered that she had seen her father carried off by an Apache. And she now

saw that Francisco Martino had been nearly murdered, as she supposed, by the same hand.

Springing from her couch with a cry of anguish, the poor girl ran out into the patio, and thence to the front gate, passing with a shudder the scalped and mutilated corpse of the *postero*.

Speeding along the trail, until she was clear of the belt of trees and the broad open plain was before her, she halted, and with parted lips and staring eyes, gazed out over the wide expanse of prairie toward the north.

As she did so she saw, dashing at headlong speed from the northern point of Laguna de los Patos, a horseman who flew toward the Rio Grande. She knew that this was none other than Frontier Frank, the Texan scout.

As she stood thus, Pedro Mercedo crept panther-like from the undergrowth behind her and sprung upon her, clutching her fair shoulders in his blood-stained fingers, a fiendish laugh bursting from his throat!

One look of horror, one loud cry, and then God kindly took her senses away!

The cry reached the room where Celesta lay, and the brave young Castilian knew that it came from feminine lips. He had urged the doctor to go in search of Marietta, but he only replied that she had evidently retired to rest. This did not now satisfy Francisco. He caught up a rifle, staggered to the front gate and passed out with feeble step. Glancing up the trail to the north, he entered the timber, and was providentially guided to a point where he was enabled toavenge himself upon his would-be murderer, the cowardly abductor of Marietta.

There was a clear space in front of him, and there the moonlight revealed a scene that strengthened him to action. The miscreant had just bound his fair captive hand and foot, and was about to press his lips to hers, when the rifle of Francisco Martino woke the echoes of the timber, and Pedro Mercedo sprang upward, clutched the air, and then fell by her side.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MUCH WRONGED.

THE real Marietta Martinez—she who had been named Dolores by Luny Lize, who had stolen her from the Lake Ranch, and substituted her own child—now resided in Franklin, on the American side of the Rio Grande.

Dolores was beautiful, though her life and habits had caused her complexion to be of a rosy tan instead of the almost lily-white which characterizes the maidens of Castilian birth. She was of medium height, of perfect Venus-like form, and graceful as a young antelope.

Dolores had been reared by an elderly Mexican, whose only support was gained by her care of the girl whom she fondly loved; far more indeed than she was by Luny Lize, whom she believed, as did every one else, to be her mother.

Frontier Frank, although not a miner, had, during his many lone rides in the service of the Government, discovered many points where pocket gold was easily found; and, caring little for it himself, he had gathered a goodly supply which he had secreted in a cave, and also at the little cabin he had built for Luny Lize.

This gold he lavished freely upon Dolores, and paid old Senora Marianna well for her care and trouble, besides furnishing poor Lizzie with the little the poor demented creature required.

The girl dressed with good taste, and was not only pretty, but comparatively well educated. She was therefore the reigning belle of Franklin, and the scout could not avoid feeling concerned when he thought of her future, though he was firmly resolved that she should one day take her rightful place in her home on the Laguna de los Patos.

All his pleadings with Luny Lize had been unavailing, when he sought to ascertain what disposition she had made of the stolen son of Don Miguel Martinez. The boy had suddenly disappeared, but Frank had always his suspicions.

The life now led by poor Lize was one full of danger, and she was liable to meet death in a violent form at almost any time. Frank felt that he would be greatly relieved could he bury his love entirely for the poor suffering wreck of a woman for whom nothing could be done. But he still had the same loathing and hatred for Don Martinez, and regretted the promise he had made to Lizzie that he would spare him. He now registered a vow that, should she die, the Castilian should not long survive his unhappy victim.

Although deprived of her natural rights, and placed in a sphere so far below her station, Dolores was in no way unhappy, unless, indeed, it was when she brooded over the state of mind of the woman she believed to be her mother. She could hardly have been happier, as a general thing, had she been in the midst of the wealth and luxury to which she had been born in that sunny home on the Laguna.

A short time previous to the occurrences just narrated a *danza* was gotten up at Franklin by a party of U. S. Army officers who were then encamped just above the town.

Although, as has been mentioned, an invitation was not necessary to the females of the place, still Dolores received one. It was delivered to her by a mounted orderly, who in report-

ing the smile with which it was received, said it made him "wilt in his very boots."

The superscription on the envelope read thus:

"DOLORES, THE DARLING OF THE DIVIDE,
"HACIENDA DEL SENORA MARIANNA,
"Franklin, Texas."

Opening the missive, the maiden read:

"SEÑORITA DOLORES:—One who has seen and loved you, with a love that is true and honorable, as his signature partially proves, will be most proud and happy to meet you at the *danza* given by himself and fellow-officers to-morrow night, and will be correspondingly miserable if you absent yourself.

"LIEUT. EDWARD MORSE, 2d Cavalry, U. S. A."

Beautiful Dolores was filled with pleasure as she perused this note, and especially so when the signature met her eye, for the name was that of an officer whom she had frequently seen of late in the streets of Franklin—a handsome and dashing young man, a perfect Apollo, who, though he had not been introduced to her, always raised his hat respectfully as he passed her.

Frontier Frank and Luny Lize were both absent, but Dolores expected the latter on the morrow. However, she dared not go to the fandango with her mother as her *duenna*, as the poor creature was always rendered doubly wild by the sound of music and the sight of dancing.

Marianna, her nurse, must attend her. This the young girl at once decided; for she felt it might be the turning point in her life. Obscure though she was, a brilliant future might be before her, as the wife of a gallant American army officer.

As she thought of this, there flashed suddenly into her mind the image of a young Mexican of great grace and beauty, and of a gay and rollicking character, who, at the last *danza*, had betrayed by every act and movement that he adored her. This Mexican youth was fair in comparison with his countrymen; and it was rumored that his mother was an American woman from Tucson, Arizona—a rumor which was probably correct.

His name was Lorenzo Castro, and he was very passionate and revengeful in disposition, ready to resent the slightest insult with his stiletto.

Dolores had never given Lorenzo any cause to think that her affections might be his; indeed she had avoided him, but this only caused young Castro to keep the trail with keener zest and resolution. Now, she began to reflect. Castro would of course be at the fandango; and, in his jealousy at witnessing her preference for the company of Lieutenant Morse, he might cause trouble. Free and easy as he was, she had heard a report that he had married the daughter of a man in Tucson, and then deserted her, and even worse conduct than this in regard to other females.

She made up her mind that she would attend the *danza* armed, and prepared to defend herself and her friends, should Castro, in his rage, attempt to cause a disturbance.

Having thus decided, Dolores hastened to prepare her own costume; and it was one that caused Senora Marianna to open her eyes in wonder.

The time arrived, and the maiden started at an early hour with old Marianna, intending to remain with friends who resided near the fandango house until after the *danza* had commenced; thus disappointing the gallant young officer, who had hoped to have been her escort.

Finding the hacienda Marianna closed and dark, Lieutenant Morse proceeded to the *danza*, to be again disappointed at the absence of the "Darling of the Divide."

Soon, however, she appeared, attired in a skirt of pink silk, relieved by another of black lace, festooned with tiny prairie flowers and delicate green vines. A tight-fitting *jaqueta* of crimson velvet, literally covered with embroidery, completed her dress. Her long hair hung loosely, being confined back of her ears by a half circlet of gold, rich in filagree work. Her beauty, and her brilliant "make up" generally, made her the center of attraction from the moment that she entered.

All eyes were turned upon her and the Senora Marianna. The latter, proud of her charge, though somewhat bewildered, went directly to one side of the room, where an old Castilian, with whom both were acquainted, politely seated them, and stood in front, passing the compliments of the season, while he requested the privilege of introducing a friend. This being accorded, Don Bazan went directly to a group of officers, and Dolores at once saw that the time had arrived when she was to directly address and accept the arm of Lieut. Edward Morse. For a moment after the introduction, which took place in due form, the heart of the young girl fluttered like a startled bird; but this was only momentary, and they were soon whirling in the mazy waltz.

There was one among the observers, whose vengeful eyes glittered like those of an enraged panther, as his fingers clutched the handle of his murderous *cuchillo*, while he stood in the doorway behind a crowd of spectators, having evidently followed Dolores to the *danza*, and in all probability acted the spy on the movements of Lieutenant Morse, as the latter repaired to the

home of the maiden, and thence to the fandango.

This was Lorenzo Castro, and none could fail to see what his feelings were; though his cowardice, or let us say prudence, caused him to hesitate a little before he acted.

Knowing that he would be shot down if he should rush in and stab his rival—for the comrades of the latter were numerous, and probably well armed—Castro ground his teeth in fury, almost deciding to run the risk of firing his revolver; although, should the ball hit one of the women, as there was every chance that it might, he would be hunted down and hanged by the Texans. In his jealous madness he lost sight of the fact that such would also be his fate if he should kill Lieutenant Morse.

At once an idea struck the unscrupulous wretch.

He would collect some of his comrades, men of the lowest stamp, get them excited to frenzy by drink, and then rush again into the fandango house, and, in the *melee*, make it a point to kill Morse, or die in the attempt.

Should he succeed, he would, during the excitement, abduct Dolores, and gallop off to a secret mountain cave, known only to himself, and from which there would be no escape.

The latter plan came into his mind without any previous thoughts in that direction, and he was at once filled with the wildest exultation as he bounded into the street and off in the direction of the river, to the low drinking and monte houses, for the purpose of collecting his crowd and carrying out his project. As he went, he thanked the saints that Frontier Frank, the scout, was not in town, for he feared him more than he did any living man in Texas.

The fandango went gayly on, all being quite unconscious of any interred interruption. All this time Morse monopolized the society of Dolores to a noticeable degree, somewhat offending his fellow-officers, but with the evident effect of making his fair partner supremely happy.

When the enjoyment was at its height, the floor being full of whirling waltzers, both musicians and dancers were startled into silence and stillness in an instant; for, from around the building arose a most unearthly yell, seemingly from a score of throats. This was followed by a volley of revolver shots, the bullets tearing through the thatch overhead, and causing showers of broken reeds to fall upon the dancers. The women shrieked in terror, as forks of flame began to crawl, snake-like, under the thatch of the eaves.

Revolvers and knives now flashed in the fire-light, and the brave and daring officers of the Second Cavalry, seeing that mischief was meant, made ready for the fray.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GIRL CAPTIVE.

THE breaking up of a fandango in a violent and tragic manner was not uncommon in the border towns at the time of which we write; neither is it quite unknown at the present time.

Loud and clear rung the orders of Lieutenant Morse.

"Encircle, and guard the women to a place of safety!"

Three sergeants sprung out of the door, beckoning the shrieking females to follow. Others stood at each side of the entrance, to guard the women as they passed.

Near at hand was an adobe building with thick walls, and into this the women were hurried.

As Lieutenant Morse, clasping Dolores with his left arm, and holding his revolver in his right, sprung out from the burning *jacal*, Lorenzo Castro gave a yell of fury, and fired his revolver. The shot knocked the cap from the head of the young officer, to whom Dolores now clung in terror, begging him not to venture into the fray. She had recognized the form of Castro, and knew at once the object and the cause of the attack. She feared, more than aught else, that her protector would be killed, and that from having exposed himself to the enemy through his love for her. But Edward Morse was a soldier, and a brave one at that, and he had no idea of losing valuable time in listening to the pleadings, even of the maiden whom he loved. Disengaging himself, therefore, from her arms, he sprang from the door into the street, his eyes blazing with fury at the thought of having been so near death at the hands of a brutal coward, and that the females had been placed in such danger by the ruffian crew.

The desperate characters under the command of Castro, were no fools to throw away their lives for nothing; and knowing that a charge from the blue coats would annihilate them to a man, if they remained in a mass, they separated, and from behind any ambush that was near, delivered their fire, bringing to the earth three of the unfortunate officers and several of the Franklin citizens, before they could form any plan of attack.

"Scatter, boys, and shoot every lurking Greaser you meet!" yelled Morse, as he rushed forward into the most dangerous locality.

The *jacal* now blazed upward to a great height; and maddened by drink and their hatred of the

Americans, the scum of the Bravo fought like fiends, for the time being, much to the surprise of the soldiers. They were joined by other villainous Mexicans, and for a time it seemed that fortune was on their side.

Singling out the leader of the desperate band, who, with three of his men, was shooting from behind the *torillas*, Lieutenant Morse quickly reloaded his revolver, and sprung around the corner, coming unexpectedly upon the trio.

With the quickness of thought, the young officer fired two shots at short range, and with wild yells, two of the Mexicans sprung into the air, and fell dead; but before the lieutenant could pull trigger on the third, who was none other than Lorenzo Castro, a bullet from the revolver of the vengeful leader of the mob struck him on the skull; a glance shot, but it caused the gallant Morse to fall senseless to the earth.

With a fiendish yell, in which were blended both triumph and hate, Castro sprung upon the prostrate form of the young officer, his lips curling away from his white clinched teeth, and his knife held over the heart of the seemingly doomed man.

Castro gazed gloatingly for a moment into the pallid face of his helpless foe, and then, as he gathered strength into his arm for the cowardly blow, a piercing shriek in front of him caused him to glance upward. It was only for an instant; but that one look showed him the gayly-attired Dolores flying toward him.

This he saw, but not the glittering barrel of a silver-washed derringer, and up again went his knife to give more force to the blow. But the deadly steel dropped from his nerveless hand, as a sounding report rung out on the air; and he sunk back, the blood oozing from a furrow along the side of his head.

With a wild cry, Dolores staggered forward, and fell upon the damp sward, her arms resting on the pulseless breast of the young lieutenant.

Outside, in the streets, the fighting had been scattering and desperate, each man for himself; but an increase of numbers in the ranks of the Greasers, and a loss of some of their own number, forced the boys in blue to take refuge in the adobe building, where the women were.

The dead and wounded were borne thither by the soldiers, who felt sure that reinforcements would soon arrive—a probability which the ruffian crew outside did not appear to have thought of, for they next proceeded to break in the door of a grocery near at hand, from which rolling out a cask of whisky, they began drinking freely of the same, giving no heed to their dead and dying, and not noticing the mysterious disappearance of their leader, Lorenzo Castro.

Poor old Senora Marianna, in her grief and terror, peeping out from her retreat in search of Dolores, had made this discovery; but none, in their scattered way of fighting, had seen the leaders of either party, after Morse had yelled his order, each being engaged in defending his own life.

The back door of the *casa* was now open, and the women induced to run to the north side of the town, where they would be safe from attack; it being impossible for the mob to discover their hiding-place, as the *casa* hid them from view. Being thus relieved from the embarrassing presence of the females, the doors were barred, and the soldiers mounted a rude ladder through a trap-door in the roof, where they would be more secure, if an attack was made by the mob upon the *casa*, when the desperate Greasers would, no doubt, break in the doors, and massacre all hands.

The situation of the officers was now most critical; for, not having supposed that they would need ammunition, they had brought but a small supply of cartridges, and these were now exhausted, except one load to each man, which they had reserved for the last and desperate moment.

Anticipating such an ending, which all now thought would soon come, the besieged were about to bring up their wounded and close the trap, when a glad cry burst from one of their number, who threw up his cap, and gave a rousing cheer.

Gazing up the street, far beyond the wrangling mob, who were robbing the store and drinking madly, they saw the boys of their regiment, the gallant Second Cavalry, dashing toward the still blazing *jacal*, at a long sweeping gallop.

Wishing to direct them to their enemies, all sprung in a line upon the ruined wall of the *casa*, and one at a time fired his revolver into the drunken and demoralized horde of Greasers. This caused the approaching detachment to drive spurs, and draw revolvers, galloping madly, by fours, down upon the appalled Mexicans, who stood for a moment terror-stricken. Then, as the fusillade of revolver shots from the cavalry tore through their huddled ranks, they fled wildly in all directions, seeking only to save their worthless lives; suddenly sobered by their perilous predicament; and the yells of agony from their less fortunate companions, who fell in their tracks, as the leaden messengers of death made fearful havoc in their ranks.

Some fled into the store that they had pillaged, only to be dragged out and shot to death by soldiers, or hanged by the citizens—nearly all of whom had been across the river in El Paso purchasing supplies from a large wagon-train, just in from Chihuahua, and which arrived upon the scene but a few moments after the cavalry.

Some of the troops were now ordered to the river to intercept and arrest all suspicious parties who might attempt to cross, the soldiers being infuriated by the death of several of those whom they had come to aid, and the disappearance of Lieutenant Morse.

While this exciting charge was in progress, and the Greasers were biting the dust on every side, Lorenzo Castro, having been only stunned by the glancing bullet that had been fired by Dolores, arose to a sitting posture and gazed upon the senseless form of the maiden who lay as if dead before him.

The sounds of battle, the yells of those whom, for his own selfish and vile purposes, he had led to their deaths, and the cheers of the soldiers, told Castro that his life was not worth a *maravedi* if he lingered long in his present position. Desperate as it was, however, he was resolved not to be balked in his latest formed plan. Dolores was in his power, and he now swore a fearful oath in silence to strengthen his resolve to carry her away.

He knew that the steed of Lieutenant Morse was the fleetest in the cavalry, and he also knew where the animal was secured.

Rising to his feet the wretch glided stealthily along behind the *torillas* to the horse of the young officer, whom he supposed to be dead. Securing the beast without being observed, Castro was soon back in the yard, when, grasping the unconscious Dolores, he placed her form before him on the saddle and prepared for the carrying out of his desperate scheme.

At this moment Lieutenant Morse, as if the action had electrified him into life, arose suddenly, causing the beast to bound forward, through the gate and into the street; not, however, before the anguished man had a fair view of Dolores in the arms of Castro, and mounted upon his own noble charger.

With a cry of despair Morse staggered in pursuit, striving to give the alarm; but the yell he would have uttered was but a gurgling and choking sound.

Up the street darted Castro at breakneck speed, passing just to the right of the scene of the fight, at least a hundred men, soldiers and citizens, being plain in view. All saw the Mexican desperado, mounted on the lieutenant's horse, and holding the gayly-dressed belle of the fandango as a shield to his own worthless carcass. No one dared to shoot for fear of killing Dolores. The cavalymen knew not what to do, as the horse of the lieutenant, stolen by Castro, could not be overtaken unless lamed.

As they thus hesitated, Lieutenant Morse, blood-stained and corpse-like, reeled around the corner of the street, his features drawn in anguish, sad to look upon, and pointing with raised arm and trembling finger toward the fast-flying steed, while he strove to yell his orders; but no intelligible sounds came from his throat, and he fell forward upon the earth, bereft of all sense.

His actions, however, showed plainly enough his wishes. Hardly had he struck the ground, before half-a-dozen troopers drove spurs, at a hasty order from the second lieutenant, and dashed in pursuit of the perfidious Greaser and his beautiful captive, the Mexican making taunting gestures, as he turned and looked derisively back over his trail, then cleared the town, and sped like a dry leaf before a norther down the Rio Grande!

Lieutenant Morse, with the wounded and dead, were taken in an ambulance to camp, the hospital tent being full and the surgeon busy; and next day the pursuing party returned, their horses completely fagged, and without the soldiers having gotten a glimpse of Lorenzo Castro, after a five-mile run; the latter having, with his victim, disappeared among the mesquites and *cacti*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CASTRO'S CRIME.

CASTRO slackened not his speed until many long leagues stretched between him and Franklin.

To describe the feelings of Dolores, as she recovered her senses, shortly after the soldiers had given up the chase, would be impossible.

The poor girl was filled with terror and despair at finding herself in the power of the unscrupulous Castro, and she endeavored to escape by throwing herself from the horse; but the ruffian, who had securely bound her in the meantime, gave a loud, sneering laugh, as he gazed gloatingly into her face. So bewildered and horrified was the poor girl that it was some time before she could recall the events so recently passed; and when at last they were reproduced to her mind, she was nearly insane in her agony, for she had no doubt now that Lieutenant Morse was dead.

Again she relapsed into a state of hopeless despair; but her nature was of a mold that such

depression did not rule long at a time, and the very helplessness and helplessness of her situation caused her to set her teeth together in a desperate resolve, bled in reserve, a raging volcano of murderous madness, born of the fiendish acts of her captor, which quenched completely her hopeless depression.

With closed eyes, and a manner that was perfectly calm, she awaited coming events, trusting that an opening would providentially occur, not only for an escape, but to avenge the death of Edward Morse, as well as her own abduction.

Castro's whole desire now was to avoid meeting any one. He knew not where Frontier Frank had gone, and he was aware that at any time he was liable to run foul of the scout. If such a thing should occur, he well knew that Frank would hunt him down, if days had to be spent in the chase. He was therefore ill at ease and paid no attention to his captive, but kept shooting his glances on all sides as he galloped on down the Rio Bravo.

Not only did he fear meeting the scout, but he also dreaded an encounter with the madwoman Luny Lize, the mother of his captive.

More than Frontier Frank, more than aught else, did Castro dread meeting this poor demented being, who he knew would literally tear him to pieces should he not succeed in killing her. And, as to that, he believed that she bore a charmed life.

He knew that he was outlawed, that his life was no longer safe in Texas, that he would be hanged like a dog if captured, and that detachments of troops would scour the mountains and plains for him to avenge their fellow-soldiers slain at Franklin. He resolved therefore to go to Mexico; but he could not there travel with any chance of safety until he could reach a point further down the river.

Due east he had galloped for ten miles before he had come to any definite conclusion as to his future movements, being then at the northern portion of the wide sweeping bend of the Rio Grande. At this point he thought of crossing into Mexico and proceeding to Laguna de los Patos, from which point his captive could not find her way back to Franklin, even did she escape.

At the bend he made a short halt to rest, and Dolores, who had for some time assumed to be in a lethargic sleep, lay quietly on the sward.

He decided that he would now, for safety, keep away from the river and strike across the open plain to Sierra Blanca, seventy miles from where he then was. He could reach that point before the following noon, and would then be but sixty miles from the place at which he had made up his mind that he would cross the Rio Grande some ten miles southeast from Fort Quitman.

Thus reasoning, and being nervous and impatient, besides apprehensive that pursuers might be upon his trail, Castro lifted Dolores, who had striven in vain to free herself, into the saddle, and then mounting, urged the noble beast out from the mesquites and over the open plain toward Sierra Blanca, flying like the wind.

The bright moonlight would enable him to discover the presence of any one at a long distance, and the extraordinary speed and endurance of his horse would enable him to avoid coming in contact with any party or parties of whatever kind.

Having been taught much of the stars by Frontier Frank, Dolores, while at the bend, had been reading the sky, and thus became aware of the direction traveled, and convinced of her exact location, and the objective point of her captor; and, as soon as they were through the mesquites and *cacti*, she stole a glance from her partially opened eyes over the far-spreading plain.

The sun arose, and still on they went, and the poor girl suffered greatly from heat, thirst, and hunger; yet not one word of complaint escaped her. She would die before she would ask a favor from this miscreant. For him, inured to hardship, he thought nothing of this little privation; and now and then he would give utterance to a taunting laugh, that caused Dolores to shudder, as she thought of what might await her if she should not effect her escape.

She had one satisfaction, of which Castro was totally ignorant. Over this same plain she had twice passed with her mother, Luny Lize, on a visit to the secret gulch, in which stood the little cabin of the latter, and in which, as she had been informed by the scout, she had passed her infant days.

Dolores felt confident that, if she could free herself from the folds of the sash with which she had been bound, and then by some means kill Castro, she could find her way to Wild Rose Pass and the cabin at which Luny Lize frequently spent days at a time. At all events, she could find Fort Davis, and perhaps would be the first to bring intelligence of the disastrous fight between the Second Cavalry and the mob at Franklin.

Such plans and thoughts ruled both, until just as the blazing sun was at the meridian, the first of the day was guided into a shady gulch,

where a cool spring bubbled from the rocks, and rank grass and flowers formed a thick carpet.

Without loss of time Castro placed Dolores by the spring, and hastened to relieve the horse from his equipments. He then approached the spring, and took a long draught. Poor Dolores felt that she was lost, that there was no hope; and a prayer burst from her trembling lips—a prayer for death, for deliverance seemed impossible!

Castro took one step toward the maiden, the fiend in his nature showing plainly on every feature of his face, and flashing from his eyes.

"*Madre de Dios!*"

This cry from poor Dolores only caused a fiendish laugh from her vile and merciless captor.

It was a laugh, however, that died on his lips, which trembled and turned of ashen hue, as did also his face, while his eyes suddenly filled with terror; for, as if the prayer of the girl was heard and answered, as if in echo to the cry, there rung out a wild scream, intoned in such a peculiar manner that, once heard, it was not likely ever to be forgotten.

Dolores heard it, and then from her inmost soul came an ejaculation of devout gratitude:

"*Gracias a Dios!*"

Castro heard it, too, and a hoarse, gurgling sound came from his throat, while he cast terror-stricken glances on every side. Then, tearing a kerchief from the neck of Dolores, he thrust it into her mouth, thus effectually gagging her.

This done, he drew his revolver, and bounded down the gulch, with murder in his eyes.

Both captive and captor knew that the cry came from the poor demented wanderer, Luny Lize.

To Dolores, it pointed to life, liberty, and a release from all that could make life terrible.

To Castro, it spoke of torture; a lingering death at the hands of a crazed and relentless woman, and she, as he believed, the mother of the maiden he had stolen from her friends, and whom he had sworn to make his slave!

Poor Dolores wrenched madly at her bonds, for she knew that this was the moment of all others in her life. Her future, her fate, her honor, were wavering in the balance, and depended upon the loosening of a silken knot. She struggled until she became exhausted, but without avail. A sickening despair almost overpowered the silence that now reigned in the gulch. It was most torturing, naught but the rippling of the water, and the sound made by the jaws of the horse, as he tore the grass from the bank, fell upon her anxious ears. So, in suspense, she waited.

Lorenzo Castro, with a superstitious and cowardly fear in his heart, stole out from the mouth of the gulch, and, screened by a few stunted cedars, gazed beyond, to the broken side of the range, and there beheld a sight that somewhat relieved his mind. As he had expected, Luny Lize was in view, mounted upon a wild-eyed Apache pony, swinging her arms in the air, and apparently talking to herself. She was following a mountain path, which he supposed must lead to the plain some hundred yards west of his position, and one which it was impossible for her to leave.

It was possible that she might see his horse, if she glanced down into the yawning abyss; but he knew that Dolores could not be within view, she being close under the cliff at its further end.

Castro felt safe from discovery, as far as he and his captive were concerned; but, he knew if the madwoman saw the horse, she would proceed at once to inspect the gulch. He knew besides that Luny Lize was an expert shot, and as cunning as an Apache; not only so, but she was as keen of sight as an eagle.

Determined that he would run no risks, he returned to his horse, re-equipped, and again mounted with his trembling captive, who now believed that her guardian angel had deserted her.

Winding in and out, amid bowlders and clumps of cedars and cacti, proceeding toward the Rio Grande, resolved to enter the Mexican territory the following night, and giving his horse an easy pace, Castro continued his journey.

A mile from the gulch he removed the gag from the mouth of Dolores, but beyond this, paid her no further attention; for he felt sure that Luny Lize was liable to dash into view at any moment, and from any point. His suspicions were not groundless, for, as he left the mountains some two miles behind him, he discovered, as he gazed back over his trail, none other than the woman whom he so dreaded, just leaving the range, and heading quite rapidly toward him. But he had no fear of being overtaken, and he knew that Luny Lize had not the slightest suspicion that her daughter Dolores was a captive in the arms of the man who was riding in front of her.

A long and weary ride over the hot plain, and there came again the cool night air, leaving Fort Quitman to the west. Then the outlaw dashed down the Rio Grande toward the point where he intended to cross into Mexico, at the

junction of Toyah creek with the Rio Bravo del Norte.

Thus, by a strange combination of tragic circumstances, Don Miguel Martinez had become a captive in the hands of his Apache-reared son, and was now being borne upon a fast-flying steed over the moonlit plain toward the Rio Grande, north from Laguna de los Patos; and the sister of the one, and daughter of the other—each having been parted from the other since the childhood of these children—being borne in the arms of an outlaw, also galloping fast toward the same point, southeast from Sierra Blanca. While, in the rear of the last-mentioned, following at full speed, upon a half-wild, snorting Apache pony, was Luny Lize, the woman who had been so deeply wronged, and who had caused father, son and daughter each to be a stranger to the other, each to follow a different life-trail!

Fast following too, in the rear of the wild youth, now holding his wretched father a captive, his noble horse straining every nerve to reach the river at the same time with those whom he pursued, was Frontier Frank, an important actor in the strange life drama of which we write.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE CONJUNCTURE.

FRONTIER FRANK never before forced his gallant horse at such headlong speed, as in that long chase over the plain from Laguna de los Patos to the Rio Grande; but all was of no avail, as too great a distance separated him from Muchacho del Noche and his captive.

Five minutes in advance, after fording the river, would be sufficient for Muchacho to conceal his victim, where he would be found only by accident; and this time he had, and this object he accomplished, before the horse of the scout had plunged into the water to ford the river. The mind of Frontier Frank was now in a most torturing condition; for, he feared that, pressed as Muchacho had been in the race, and in consequence prevented from advancing beyond the river toward the Apache Mountains, he would kill his captive—murder his own father.

Terrible and revolting as this possibility was, the scout could not prevent the young brave from becoming a parricide, unless by some providential means, he could come on him.

When Frank reached the Texas bank of the river, he immediately secreted his horse in a thicket of mesquites, and with great caution proceeded along the many dark wash-outs, where the moon did not penetrate, listening intently.

While thus occupied, let us leave him, to follow others of the characters whom we have met.

Muchacho del Noche soon reached the Texas bank, when, dismounting, and removing his saddle and bridle, he allowed his mustang to go free over the plain. Don Martinez was, from fatigue and the thought of the terrible fate that was before him, so benumbed, physically and mentally, as to be incapable of speech or motion; and his savage young captor dragged him through a tangled thicket, entirely shut in by a wall of mesquites. This done, Muchacho returned, with a stealthy, gliding step, toward the river, to watch for the advent of his pursuer, the man who had saved his life, and who, in consequence, was safe from any harm at his hands, but whom the young brave desired to avoid.

Luny Lize did not know the horseman whom she had discovered, as she aimlessly wandered in the mountains; but an insane desire to know what it was that he bore with him, caused her to give chase, she having, at the time, nothing to call her in any particular direction. And a chase it was, the entire distance to the river, during the remaining half of the day, and far into the night; but she never once thought of a halt, or of relinquishing her object, namely, to gain a knowledge of what the lone rider carried before him. The frequent glances which she could see that he gave behind him, to watch her progress, proved that he wished to avoid being overtaken; and this strengthened Luny Lize in her resolve to continue on.

So close did she get, that Castro knew he could not hope to reach the ford and cross the river, before she would be upon him. He wished also to reconnoiter before proceeding further. He therefore entered a dense thicket, where he dropped Dolores upon the sward, secured his horse, and stole off amid the cacti and mesquites to investigate how affairs stood at the ford; for he had, naturally, no desire to fall in with company of any kind.

Poor Dolores had been so terrified at her perilous position that, although she had simulated somnolence, she had not really slept for two days and nights; and no sooner did she realize that she was alone, than she sunk into a death-like slumber. Thus, the poor girl lay, mercifully unconscious, for the time, of her recent sufferings and her dread situation; while, near her, were those through whose veins ran the same blood, the nearest relatives she had on earth, and one of whom would as quickly plunge his knife into her heart as he would into

that of a fawn: the other was bound, a prisoner like herself, but he would not have known that she was aught to him, had he seen her.

Scouting among the chaparral near at hand, was also her loved guardian, Frontier Frank, who, had he known that she was near, and in the clutches of a villain, would have moved heaven and earth, so to speak, to save her. And still another; tearing wildly through the mesquites up the stream, was one whom she had been taught to call mother—a poor, demented being, and also ignorant of her presence.

When Don Martinez, weak and listless, slipped to earth, from the horse of his captor, he had given up all hope of life. He felt that he was doomed to death by his own son, and that this was in punishment of his many crimes. All his appeals, throughout their long ride, had passed unnoticed, although Don Miguel knew that his son, reared among the Apaches, could understand much of what he said.

Words cannot express the horror and dread that he felt. He had no doubt of the relationship between himself and his savage captor, and the thought of the brutal manner in which the young brave, indifferent to his pleadings, had treated him, incensed him greatly; and, weak though he was, made him resolve upon planning an escape. He was more hopeful of this when he observed the departure of his captor from the opening.

On one or two occasions during his ride over the plain, he had perceived a horseman evidently in hot pursuit; and now, as his reasoning faculties became clearer, Don Miguel wandered back in thought to Rancho del Laguna. He could think of no one there, except the mysterious Texan scout, who would dare attempt to follow, and rescue him.

The thought that it might be this man who was on the trail greatly encouraged him, and he began to wrench desperately at his bonds; but his hands were secured behind his back, and there seemed for a time little chance of success. Suddenly, however, they snapped, and he was on the road to freedom. This much accomplished, he endeavored to stand erect, but found it impossible. Fearing to remain longer, he crawled upon hands and knees as rapidly as he could, among the mesquites and prickly pears which surrounded him.

On went the old Castilian, stealthily, for some distance, until he reached a small opening, where the moonlight revealed the prostrate figure of a beautiful girl, attired in a gaudy costume, and apparently asleep or unconscious.

There was a something in the face of the maiden that reminded Don Miguel of some one whom he had seen; but, had his life depended on it, he could not have told who it was.

But, he was soon to know—soon to understand the resemblance. To his further surprise, he next discovered that the girl was bound, hand and foot. He felt in the pocket of his *jaqueta*, and found a knife, which he opened; and then, without in the least disturbing the fair sleeper he severed the bonds at her ankles and wrists; her hands, which had been clasped over her breast, parting, and slipping down to the ground at her side.

As the arm nearest to the old Castilian fell amid the grass, a portion of the arm was bared, which revealed the exact representation of an alligator, in vermilion; in position, color, and size, the very counterpart of that which Don Miguel had discovered on the arm of his captor, the Indian-reared youth!

All the terrible feelings that produce a soul-drawn agony filled the brain of the old man. He strove to give vent to them, but the sound that he uttered resembled only the gasping noise made by a strong man in his death-struggle.

What mystery was this? Padre Jose had told him that the figure of an alligator had been pricked upon the arm of his son in infancy, by the old nurse who was now dead. Could it be possible that she had also put this mark upon his daughter, or the child of some other person? The marks were both in the same place, were of the same size, and the same color.

What could it mean? Marietta, he knew, had a turtle upon her arm. Why had the nurse put different figures upon the arms of his children? Had she done so? Was Marietta indeed his child? *Madre de Dios!* Was he going insane? Of course, Marietta was his daughter; but who was this maiden, and how and why had she been thus marked?

These perplexing, maddening thoughts came rushing into Don Miguel's mind, and then followed one which speedily became a certainty. It shot through his brain as it came to him, leaving a scathing, seared trail behind it.

The resemblance to some one whom he had seen and known—ay, had been familiar with—that had struck him as he peered through the screen of leaves, was no longer a mystery. He felt, he acknowledged this, as he lowered his head to the earth, and again gazed at the profile of the maiden outlined against the moonlit sky. The cast of countenance was the exact counterpart of his dead wife!

Don Miguel crawled, in a trembling, tottering manner, into the thicket once more; and there, screened from view, fell upon the ground, while

he strove in a spasmodic way to think and reason, fighting desperately all the time against hunger, thirst and sleep, his brain nearly bursting with the fast-accumulating tortures which the Fates seemed to have held in reserve for years that they might in the end come upon him in a stampede and overwhelm him.

Don Miguel Martinez was now suffering that just retribution which, sooner or later, comes upon transgressors; being at last made to understand and realize the mountains of misery he had hurled upon and with which he had crushed many a poor soul, in order that he might gratify his own passions.

And although anguish, almost insupportable, now racked his frame, he would have been chained to the spot with fresh horror had he looked out through the branches into the opening he had just crawled from; for, on the opposite side from his position, the leaves were parted, revealing a hideously-painted face framed in a wealth of long black hair, and from out the ghastly bars of gypsum glittered two dark-blue but eagle-like eyes, at first sweeping the open space, and then resting upon the sleeping beauty, but showing nothing in their depths of the extreme amazement and exultation that ruled the brain.

One outstretched arm, the hand of which clutched a murderous looking knife, was thrust clear of the foliage, revealing, near the shoulder, the blood-red figure of an alligator!

Muchacho del Noche, true to his training, was still bent on business.

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW HORROR.

WHEN Frontier Frank was yet on the Mexican side of the Rio Grande, Lorenzo Castro had arrived at a clump of bushes, from his concealment in which he could command a full view of the wood. His fright may be imagined as he discovered Muchacho del Noche with a captive.

Not for a moment did he suppose that the brave had been on a lone scout. If he had he would at once have shot him from his horse.

Castro concluded, naturally, that a war-party of Apaches were encamped on the border of the mesquites, and that this young brave had captured some lone rider on the opposite side of the river.

His fear withheld all movement until the Indian and his captive had disappeared in the thicket; then the outlaw became much concerned, for they were evidently proceeding in such a course as to come upon his horse and Dolores.

The attention of Castro was so taken up by the movements of Muchacho del Noche that he failed to observe Frontier Frank as the latter forded the river. The scout's motions were very rapid. After securing his steed he set about the search for some signs of Don Miguel and his captor. So it chanced that both Frank and the Mexican started for the ford at about the same time, neither of them dreaming of the presence of the other.

It was at this time, also, that Muchacho proceeded toward the ford from another direction for the purpose, as we have seen, of ascertaining the movements of the scout. Thus all three were approaching the same objective point, each ignorant of the presence of the others. Castro was in advance, and it was not long before the scout saw and recognized him. Frank at once decided that this was an unusual range for the Mexican, and that he was here for no good purpose. For a couple of years he had been seeking to secure proof that Castro was a thief and an assassin, and up to this time he had been foiled by the cunning Mexican.

Had not the scout wished to follow Muchacho del Noche and prevent the murder of Don Miguel by his own son, he would have followed Castro, to see if there was not something now that would confirm his previous suspicions; but it was a critical moment, and he could not spare the time. He therefore detached the lasso from his belt, adjusted the noose, and made ready for the first favorable opportunity that offered for the use of it. As if to favor him, at this moment Castro crawled out from the thicket and stood erect to get a more extensive view of the ground beyond the river. While he thus gazed the lasso cut the air and the deadly coil encircled the throat of the outlaw.

The next moment the scout was upon his captive, whose wrists he bound firmly behind him, the ruffian thinking that he was known as the abductor of Dolores, and feeling that he was doomed to death.

Without a word, Frank pushed him on, and into a "wash-out," just in time to prevent being discovered by Muchacho del Noche, although the scout knew nothing of this.

Up the wash out, at speed, he urged Castro, the latter trembling and speechless, feeling that there could be no escape from such a man as he knew Frontier Frank to be. At length they reached a point more secluded than the rest, and here the scout bound Castro beyond the chance of escape. Quaking with terror, now that he felt positive that he was to be tortured to death, the wretch strove to speak, but could not articulate a syllable. Speech, however, would have availed him nothing, for the scout,

as soon as he had secured him, sprung down the winding wash-out and speedily disappeared.

Relieved from dread of immediate torture, Castro regained partially his self-control. He could not now believe that Frank had discovered Dolores, for if he had he would not thus have spared him.

It might be, however, that Dolores was now in great danger, and, if so, then the scout might be expected at any moment to return and torture him to death.

When Frank left Castro, his great anxiety was in regard to Don Miguel and Muchacho del Noche. Not that he cared a fig for the safety of the Castilian, but that he wished for the sake of the unhappy son, whom he was resolved, if possible, to wean from a savage life, to prevent that son from murdering and scalping his own father.

Such a horrible crime must be prevented, even though he lost his own life in the attempt.

Had the scout known that, had he not been in such a hurry to get Castro from the vicinity of the ford, he would have seen Muchacho, he would have been furious, and probably would have cursed the Mexican roundly for crossing his trail; although the time came, not long afterward, when he thought it providential in the extreme that he had been so fortunate as to come upon him.

Hastening down the wash-out a short distance the scout was suddenly brought to a halt by a movement in the bushes beyond the bank of the gully in the mesquites.

At last he had fortunately heard an indication of either man or beast; but he knew not which. He did know that the sound was not made by his own animal.

Crawling cautiously up the bank and through the bushes, Frank soon came within view of a horse, which, to his joy, he saw was the animal that had been ridden by Muchacho del Noche. He had reasoned correctly!

Those, of whom he was in pursuit, were still near at hand. The young brave had, as the scout had supposed, been too cunning to leave cover, and risk capture on his fagged mustang, on the plain beyond.

Frank also perceived the saddle and bridle, but he felt confident that Muchacho had taken his captive some distance from his outfit, in order that he might be more secure from discovery. The scout felt much relieved, for he reasoned that if the youth intended killing his captive, he would have done so at once upon reaching cover, and then escaped in the chaparral down the river, and not have left his horse and equipments thus, and liable to be stolen.

Not that the mustang was worth very much in its present state; but, because it would be a disgrace for the young brave to return from his first scout without horse and equipments with which he had set out, and the fact that the mustang was so completely used up, showing desperate service on the trail—a hard run for life—would be a lasting honor to the rider.

From all this, Frank decided that Don Martinez was, for the present, safe from deadly injury at the hands of his son, and that the latter intended to take his captive, at all risks, to the Apache Mountains.

If Don Miguel was to be tortured, it ought, in justice, to be done by those whom he had most foully wronged—Lizzie Ellsworth and himself. There could be no retribution otherwise.

Suddenly, as this last thought struck him, Frontier Frank came to a full stop in his stealthy passage through the dense thicket.

Something now occurred to his mind that he had not previously thought of.

Since his recent experiences at Rancho del Laguna—since he had saved the life of Marietta Martinez, and she had been held in his arms, yes, clasped to his breast—since she had spoken words of thanks, and looked that gratitude and regard from her sweet eyes, far more strongly than any mere words could have expressed—since all this had occurred, how could he kill the man, in whose veins the same blood flowed—her father in the sight of God, if not in that of man?

Frontier Frank raised his fist in the air and brought it down hard upon the earth; there, in the darkness, swearing that not a hair of the head of Don Miguel Martinez should ever be harmed by him!

As suddenly as the thought had come to him, that since he had become a friend on speaking terms with Marietta, and that the latter held him in high regard—just as suddenly did he make his decision; throwing to the winds his strong desire for revenge, for he knew that he could never look that fair girl in the eye, or Dolores, or even Muchacho del Noche, if he were the cause of their father's death.

The scout was filled with the utmost surprise that these conclusions had never before been reached by him, and he felt relieved, greatly relieved, of a most grievous burden, feeling that he had been standing on the edge of a volcano crater, into the seething depths of which he would have been hurled, his life doubly wrecked by his having stained his hands in the blood of the father of those whom he had devoted his life to protect, and whom he loved most dearly!

More at ease, Frontier Frank now crawled onward, more determined than ever that he would save Don Miguel, and now resolving that he would return the old Castilian to Rancho del Laguna, and in the event of the death of Luny Lize, to use every effort in his power to reunite the family, without, however, revealing the secret of Marietta's birth.

On went the scout toward a scene that would cause the warmest blood in his veins to congeal in horror, his heart to bound in a torturing spasm, and his brain to feel like molten lead!

Conscious that a moonlit opening was in front of him, the scout carefully parted the branches; but his fingers closed upon the thorn-guarded mesquites in a vise-like grip, forcing the wooden needles into his flesh unheeded, his eyes protruding in a most horrifying stare that would have been terrible to witness, his strong frame trembling as if stricken with palsy, and his breath coming and going in short, hissing gasps.

Could he believe his eyes? Yes; it was no vision conjured up in his imagination by his recent troubled thoughts; though such a scene might well have been dreamed of after what he had gone through.

There in the little opening upon the center of which the moon smiled placidly, lay Dolores—his Dolores!—whom he had left safe in Franklin but the other day. No, he could not be mistaken.

Dressed in gaudy attire, torn and crumpled, her face pallid as that of a corpse, her eyes staring in terrible dread upward. Yes, it was Dolores, the Darling of the Divide!

And well might her face wear that look of horror, for standing directly over her, was Muchacho del Noche, now in war-paint, his eyes flashing with a thirst for blood out from the bars of white gypsum that was daubed on cheeks and brow, his long hair flowing down over his naked shoulders and back to his waist, while above the quick heaving breast of the beautiful girl was held his long scalping-knife, firm clutched, and his muscles swelled to give greater force to the murderous intended blow, which seemed to be withheld only that the girl might enjoy the torture, that he might glory over the horror of his lovely prize whose scalp was soon to decorate his shield!

Frontier Frank was incapable, through horror, of either speech or motion.

And no wonder was it, for he had saved Don Miguel from being murdered by Muchacho del Noche in this same manner at Laguna del Pato, and now the Apache-reared boy was about to murder and scalp his own sister, the true Marietta Martinez!

CHAPTER XXI.

TOTEMS AND TERRORS.

FRONTIER FRANK upon his knees, his hands clutched about the mesquites that shielded him from view, but did not shut out from him the dread sight in the opening, with his eyes fixed, gazed upon the glittering steel held in the hand of Muchacho del Noche over the breast of Dolores, the own sister of the war-painted youth! And beyond the scout, on the north side of the open space, in almost the same position, and with the same expression, was Don Martinez, looking out upon the same fearful tableau.

There was no mercy in the eyes that glittered from between those bars; but surely, mercy from on high sent a breeze at that moment, which tossed aside a rag of the torn velvet sleeve and disclosed the mark of the alligator upon the plump arm of the maiden.

No sooner did Muchacho see the same totem in the same position as was that upon his own arm, than his eyes began to dilate in superstitious wonder. With a wild bound he sprung into the air, then grasped Dolores in his arms, and dashed into the dark shades before either of those who witnessed it could make a move to prevent him.

Neither Don Miguel nor Frontier Frank would, if they had given a second thought, have dared make a movement at the time that Dolores was in such deadly peril, for they would have known that the instant they did so the fatal knife would have descended.

Never were anguished mortals more suddenly relieved than were Don Miguel and the scout when they discovered the flutter of the torn sleeve, and the change in the expression of the wild youth. But when Muchacho bounded away with Dolores, who seemed to have lost all power to cry out, Don Miguel relapsed as suddenly. All the world seemed to be engaged in the work of torturing him, to the destruction of both body and mind.

Frank, however, from his knowledge of Indian character, knew that Dolores would be safe from harm at the hand of any of the Apaches; but, for all that, he knew that she must be suffering the most horrible fright, and he resolved to effect her release. He sprung, therefore, through the mesquites at a reckless pace, coming directly upon Don Miguel, who now believed that a fresh horror was being launched upon him. Frank felt himself clutched by the legs, and he fell forward, the next

startled and astonished man on earth; for he had been positive that no human being was in the vicinity, except Muchacho del Noche.

However, the scout did not waste time in pondering on the situation. He regained his feet, and grappled with his unknown foe, striving, but in vain, to draw his knife. It was only for a moment, for each soon recognized the other, to their mutual relief, Don Miguel crying out:

"Senor Frank, *salvador mio*. You are the guardian angel of my life, and of my family!"

"Yet you would have killed me, had you been armed."

"I knew you not. I do not know myself. An avalanche of misery has been hurled upon me. I saw you pursuing the savage who carried me from Rancho del Laguna. Alas! I have no hope of ever returning thither!"

"Cheer up! All will yet be well. He was about to murder you, when you lay senseless at Laguna de los Patos, but I shot the knife from his hand. I came in pursuit to-night."

"*Santissima Maria!*" You are trebly the *salvador* of me and mine! Saw you the terrible tragic scene in this spot a moment ago?"

"I witnessed it all, and must now go to save the maiden. She is very dear to me."

"You have seen her, then, before to-night, senor?"

"I have known her since childhood," was the reply. "But I must away. Hasten and secrete yourself, Don Martin, by or near the ford."

Away dashed the scout, in desperate haste, disregarding the pleading expression that seemed frozen upon the face of the old Castilian when he revealed the fact that he had known Dolores since childhood. Don Miguel had wished to ask an explanation of the mysterious figure on the maiden's arm, but he now felt that he must refrain from questioning any one on the subject, excepting Padre Jose, who, he began to fear, had not revealed to him the whole truth.

It seemed impossible that two persons, one in civilized life and the other a savage, should have the same peculiar mark imprinted in the place and manner. The scout, Don Miguel was positive, must have observed, at Laguna de los Patos, the alligator mark on the arm of the young brave, and must also have been struck by the fact that, in several places, the white skin of the youth was revealed, proving that he was a white man who had been taken captive when a child, and reared as an Indian. Yes; Senor Frank must know a great deal, which he had either no time to explain, or else of which he did not care to give any explanation.

In a very few hours this brave and noble Texano had done more for him and his, without reward or any hope of reward, than all the rest of the world has ever done.

Don Miguel pressed his hands upon his forehead, fully realizing that, if he were called upon to pass through much more torture of mind, he would either be dead from an overstrained brain, or hopelessly insane.

For a few moments he was totally unconscious of his surroundings; then a most unearthly piercing shriek went up through the night air, and Don Miguel started to his feet, and fled toward the ford, crawling into the thick chaparral to avoid the fresh horrors which he felt sure were coming thick upon him.

Frontier Frank tore rapidly along the winding deer-paths for a long distance, scrutinizing closely on all sides for Muchacha del Noche and Dolores, and nearly frantic at the thought of what must be the sufferings of the poor girl who was now in the power of a war-painted savage; when suddenly a thought flashed upon his mind, born of his anxiety for Dolores, that she must have been abducted from her home in Franklin by Lorenzo Castro.

Such had been his intense concern and horror at the scene in the opening, that, in the excitement, he had not taken the time to reason and ponder in regard to the mysterious and most astounding circumstance, that Dolores should be nearly one hundred and fifty miles from her home; and, for the same reasons, the fact that he had captured and secured Castro to the root of a tree in the "Wash-out," had been banished from his mind.

Now all was plain, and he was positive that Dolores had been forcibly carried away from Franklin by this cowardly Mexican; indeed there was no other way in which he could account for the presence of both.

Satisfied on this score, Frontier Frank became filled with the most desperate and vengeful fury. Clutching his bowie-knife, he pushed on toward the "wash-out," a shriek of most terrible alarm, sounding from that direction, hastening his speed.

The scout, however, was doomed to be deprived of his anticipated revenge, as will be seen when we detail the movements of Muchacho del Noche.

When the latter, with Dolores in his arms, dashed from the opening, he ran in a zig-zag course, in and out of the gully, and amid the winding deer paths, until he felt sure that he had baffled all pursuit. Then he secreted his fair captive in a dense thicket, and returned

at speed toward the scene of the recent most singular and eventful meetings and happenings, of and connected with some of our principal characters.

Upon approaching the ford, Muchacho del Noche discovered the horse which Lorenzo Castro had stolen in Franklin, and which was the property of Lieutenant Morse.

Greatly gratified at the sight the young brave now thought that he could strike out over the plain with his captives, if he could bring the two together—he not being aware of the fact that Don Miguel had freed himself and escaped, and also ignorant that the horse before him had been ridden until he was utterly exhausted. He very soon, however, discovered both these facts; and resolving that he would recapture Don Miguel, Muchacho del Noche equipped both horses, and led the animals into an adjacent gully, when, to his agreeable surprise, a low neighing betrayed the presence of another animal, this being the black steed belonging to Frank. The young brave secured this also, and led the three beasts up the gully, which happened to be the same within which Lorenzo Castro now lay bound.

But a short distance did Muchacho proceed, when a most fearful cry of horror and dread, at his left, surprised him; causing him to spring back behind one of the horses, and draw his scalping-knife.

A glance, however, explained all. There was a captive near at hand, in place of the one that he had lost; and this would enable him to depart immediately, his having stolen all the horses, preventing anything like pursuit.

Quickly the young savage cut loose the miserable Mexican, who was struck dumb with terror, for there was nothing upon earth of which he had such dread as an Apache.

Putting Castro in the saddle, upon the very horse which the latter had stolen, Muchacho del Noche secured the ankles of his captive beneath the horse's body, in such a manner as to make escape impossible.

This done, the young brave mounted the steed of Frontier Frank, and returned for Dolores. He did not, as we know, proceed far without molestation, for the scout had heard Castro's cry, and was now coming toward him. Seeing Muchacho mounted upon his own noble black, Frank became furious.

Instantly he jerked his revolver, and as quickly fired three shots in succession, cutting in twain the raw-hide rope, and the horse of Lieutenant Morse dashed away in fright into the chaparral with Lorenzo Castro, bound fast upon the saddle, the scout feeling confident that the animal would not run far.

Having accomplished this much, Frank gave a piercing whistle, which caused his black steed, regardless of the mad attempts of its savage rider, to plunge in the direction of its master.

Realizing that he would be captured, Muchacho sprang from the horse, and into the dense mesquites, most terribly enraged at being baffled on all sides; and beginning to think that he was never to prove that the eagle-feathers of a chief were his by right of proved prowess, as well as through the agency of the Big Medicine Squaw, as "Bad Medicine" had evidently been on his trail, ever since he had crossed the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XXII.

LUNY LIZE'S TRIUMPH.

FRONTIER FRANK was a prairie and mountain wanderer by inclination, being noted as a skillful scout and successful Indian-fighter. In many most dangerous, exciting and bloody scenes he had been a leading actor; but never before had he been called upon to take a prominent part in so many exciting scenes as in the short space of time since his prompt action had been called for, in the duello between Pedro and Francisco, in the gardens of Rancho del Laguna.

He knew, by the expression he had observed on the face of Don Miguel, as well as by his actions, that he had discovered the alligator totem on both Muchacho and Dolores; but why he should notice them in connection with himself especially, as he seemed to have done, was what the scout could not understand. Had Frank not known the whole secret, he would have attributed the emotion betrayed by the old Castilian to his terror and suffering; but he now felt convinced that in some manner, Don Miguel had become possessed of the secret of the old nurse. The scout knew that she had died some years previous, and he felt assured that she would not have dared to confess to the mark on the arm of the female babe, as that would have revealed the fact that she had been stolen, and another substituted; Marietta having no mark of the kind. No, the old woman could never have found the courage, even when dying, to tell such a thing.

Frank knew that Don Miguel Martinez was not one who would be likely to faint at the sight of dead men; therefore his being so overcome on the bank of the lake could only have been caused by recognizing in the young brave his lost son.

All that was clear enough: but here was this agitation in regard to Dolores.

There was only one solution to the puzzle.

Don Miguel must, in some way, have arrived at a suspicion that the vengeance, threatened so many years ago by Elizabeth Ellsworth, had extended further than the stealing of his son.

But little time had the scout found to ponder upon these affairs; for, as he held to the bridle-rein after Muchacho del Noche had disappeared in one direction and Lorenzo Castro in another, the thought that the young brave might even yet succeed in getting away with Dolores, if he himself did not in some way manage to awaken the old Castilian to united and prompt action in assisting in the search, came forcibly upon him.

But Frank had yet to witness a startling scene, that would cause him to give up all hope of assistance from Don Miguel, and indeed all hope of again seeing the latter alive. To explain this we must go back to Luny Lize, who had followed Lorenzo Castro from Sierra Blanca, more through curiosity in regard to the character of his burden than himself.

Had she known that it was Castro, and that Dolores was his captive, he would never have reached the Rio Grande. As it was, the cunning demented woman decided that she would keep straight ahead, riding slowly down the river-bank, and keep her eye on the surface of the water at the distant ford.

She had not been within view of the ford for five minutes when, to her astonishment, she saw another man, also with a burden in his arms, crossing the river; but, differently from the former, it was from Mexico into Texas. The distance was too great for her to perceive that this man was an Indian, although, from the absence of any head-covering, she supposed that he was.

Had she known that it was Muchacho, and that he had captured Don Miguel Martinez—his own father—the man who had blighted her life and caused her to live in constant misery, and that the boy she had stolen from Rancho del Laguna intended to deliver his captive father over to old Cochise for torture—had Luny Lize known this, she would have torn through the chaparral at the utmost speed of her mustang, and deprived the young brave, who believed the Big Medicine Squaw to be his mother, of his capture, and tortured Don Miguel herself.

The time had indeed nearly arrived, when she had promised herself the grand ending of her long schemes and plans of revenge.

Don Miguel might die, and thus cheat her of the insane joy she had so long anticipated and dreamed of. She herself might die, and then he would rejoice that at last he was free from her fearful persecutions.

This thought had been maddening to Luny Lize, and she had already mapped out in her mind, the exact ceremonies to go through at her grand finale. Indeed, this very thing had occupied her poor crazed brain much this very day; the thought being only banished by the sight of the overburdened man and horse at the ford.

She saw that something strange was about to occur. The man whom she had been following from Sierra Blanca was now to meet this man from Mexico on the Texas bank. They could scarce avoid meeting.

As she thus reasoned, Luny Lize was again surprised by another horseman, urging his animal over the ford; evidently either a friend of the first, or an enemy in pursuit. Mad, though she was, the poor creature was ever cunning and cautious.

Her manner of life caused her naturally to be so; and she passed slowly eastward, toward the ford, giving time for all the parties she had discovered, to meet, whether in peace or in war.

Much puzzled at the long silence was Luny Lize; but she proceeded slowly, on hearing at last the shriek of Castro, as the latter, from the place where he was bound, in the "wash-out," suddenly discovered Muchacho del Noche.

The demented woman at once decided that the parties she had observed, and the man she had followed, were enemies, and were fighting. Apprehending danger, and thinking that there might be a large encampment ahead, Lize proceeded more slowly, and with great caution, until she reached the vicinity of the ford. There she paused for some time, listening for sounds, by which she might locate the camp of the strangers, but without avail.

At length, to her great delight, she discovered Don Miguel Martinez, her betrayer, darting into a thicket near at hand. With difficulty suppressing a shriek of joy, lest some one hearing her might come between her and her long anticipated final act of vengeance, Luny Lize urged her mustang to the edge of the thicket, which was of small circumference, and somewhat removed from other patches of mesquite, and from thence gazed downward, ready to spring instantly from her steed, if the old Castilian made any attempt to escape.

The face of the madwoman was pale with excitement, at having come so unexpectedly upon the one human being on earth whom she

wished at that moment to meet—the man whom she hated with a hatred that was fiendish in its intensity.

Don Miguel Martinez was now in Texas, far from his home, and, to all appearances, was a skulking fugitive; and, in the mind of Luny Lize, this was an astonishing fact, which, coupled with what had preceded it, brought about an interval of comparative sanity to the poor demented creature, whose whole superstitious nature was aroused on the instant. To her it seemed that, from her aimless wanderings in the mountains, she had been brought, through what had appeared but her own simple curiosity, afar over the plain from Sierra Blanca to this particular point; and, through her lingering to ascertain the character of the two horsemen and their burdens, she had been drawn to this very spot, and at the very moment which brought her hated enemy into her power.

Not only this, but she believed that through strange influences, Don Miguel had been providentially decoyed from his far away home into her power, for the purpose of having meted out to him the long deferred torture which would bring his life and her revenge to an end at the same time.

It must be the hand of God!

The day of retribution had come at last.

All that was just, and right, and virtuous upon earth, united in the demand that the Serpent of El Paso must die!

The long deferred time had arrived when her oath would be fulfilled to the letter.

Don Miguel, as he heard the approach of a horse, which, as the animal neared the thicket, caused him to quake, and his teeth to chatter, while he wished that it were possible for him to sink into the earth and die—death being much to be preferred to the tortures which he had been, and was suffering—gazed up through the branches, and as he recognized Luny Lize, he heaved a great sigh of relief, for he had frequently seen this strange woman in El Paso and Franklin. Knowing nothing of the poor creature's identity with Elizabeth Ellsworth, he felt relieved at beholding her, as she was a connecting link with familiar scenes, which were devoid of the horrors now surrounding him.

The madwoman would not harm him. (Of this he was positive; and he immediately, as a drowning man clutches at a straw, conceived the idea of escaping from the horrors which environed him, through her means.

Not a moment did these two, so strangely met, gaze at each other while the thoughts we have recorded flashed through their minds. The old Castilian crawled quickly out, and with a pleading voice, his face filled with abject terror, as he shot a glance toward the scene of his recent dread experiences, exclaimed:

"*Madre de Dios* has sent you, my good woman. Save me! There are Indians in yonder, from whom I have escaped, and they will soon be here to kill me. I am Don Martinez, of Rancho del Laguna in Mexico, and I will reward you to any extent, if you will allow me to go with you. Take me over the river, and to my home, for the love of the good God! I am not a heavy burden. Do not desert me, but save me from these ruthless savages!"

This, he rattled off in a heartfelt, pleading voice, his face mirroring the inward torture that was racking his very soul. Luny Lize slid back upon the cantle of her saddle, the fiendish joy and exultation that contorted her weather-beaten face, being taken by Don Miguel for her natural expression of insanity.

Eagerly the old Castilian clambered into the saddle, and then the bony arms of Luny Lize encircled him, and the mustang sprung to the great relief and joy of the unhappy man.

But the wild experiences of the night were not over.

Of all the hellish horrors, there was one in store that eclipsed them; for the mustang was now headed away from the ford, and up the river—a fact which proved to Don Martinez that he had been entrapped. He struggled, therefore, to free himself, but the grip of those bony arms was firm as the clasp of death.

Then, from the lips of the madwoman, burst a taunting laugh, followed by word which flew through the brain of the wretched man like arrows of red-hot iron. Each word was a half-shriek, half-scream.

"Capitan Martinez shall curse the day he ever saw the light! He shall curse the mother who bore him, and curse his Maker. I swear it! I, the wreck, the disgraced, the polluted—I swear it by my hopes of that happiness hereafter which has been denied me here. I, Elizabeth Ellsworth—Luny Lize!"

Don Miguel Martinez bent back stiffly, his eyes fixed and glassy, his breath coming in gasps. Then, blood oozed from his mouth and nostrils, and he sunk, limp, and senseless, still clutched tightly by the insane creature, whose loud cries of exultation shot through the brain of Frontier Frank where he was standing, open-mouthed in his tracks, and speechless with amazement and horror, as Luny Lize dashed past on her mustang without noticing his presence, the unresisting form of Don Miguel Martinez still clasped fiercely to her breast!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SWIFT RETRIBUTION.

It was but a few moments after the scout had regained his horse that Luny Lize dashed past him with the captive, Don Miguel, and it was not strange if Frank felt now overpowered with the complicated state of affairs on hand.

His skill, powers of endurance, forbearance and mental and bodily exertion had been in a constant state of bewilderment and torture since the previous afternoon, and, strive as he might, he could not "keep even with the game."

No sooner had he extricated one of the most unfortunate of human beings from deadly peril, and saved the life of another, than the first again called for his immediate service. Don Miguel was now in the power of one whom he had most foully wronged, and whose vengeance was as inevitable as Fate itself; but the scout felt that her cup of revenge had now been filled to overflowing.

The stolen son of Don Martinez had been the prime mover in the whole series of most startling and tragic occurrences, and the end was as deeply shrouded in mystery and darkness as the beginning had been startling and terrible.

Frontier Frank was so bewildered that he knew not at first what move to make; but, knowing that it would be impossible for Muchacho to escape with Dolores upon a broken-down horse, he resolved first to save Don Martinez, if possible, his very soul now being filled with pity for the miserable man, who had been tortured almost beyond endurance for so many years.

With this thought Frank sprung to his saddle and urged his steed up the river.

He knew that the horse of Luny Lize could not go far, and he felt sure that she would be so taken up with her captive that she would not be so particular in keeping a look-out for pursuers as usual.

Without losing time in following her trail, the scout rode rapidly toward the first point in the sweep of the bend, intending, after clearing the mesquites and reaching the ribbon of clear ground to follow the same up the bend to the north.

But a very short time did Frank thus ride before he broke cover and found himself on the very bank of the Rio Grande. On he went until, having turned a bend in the bush, he brought his horse to his haunches by a hasty jerk; for some fifty yards away was a mounted man, clearly seen in the bright moonlight. The horse was cropping the grass along the very edge of the dizzy height, which at this point formed the bank of the river, and the scout immediately recognized Lorenzo Castro, whose feet were bound beneath the body of the animal, his hands fast behind.

It was all plain. The animal and the captive that he had released from Muchacho, by shooting the lariat in twain, were before him.

It was, as Frank knew, the noble cavalry horse of Lieutenant Morse; for he had guided scouting parties under the command of that officer.

At first he had not taken notice of the animal, for he was greatly excited; but now, as he recognized the horse, he felt confident that Castro had stolen the animal in Franklin, abducted Dolores, and brought her with him, the double load wearing the horse greatly on so long a ride—in fact, few animals could have made such a run.

For this reason Frank knew that the horse would be nervous and easily frightened, and for the beast's sake, more than that of the rider, he felt forced to wait, hoping that it would soon wander from the dangerous verge of the bank, as, by being suddenly startled, it might, by a plunge, be precipitated down the dread chasm.

Frontier Frank, however, was not the man to remain inactive on such a critical occasion. He could not linger in his search after Luny Lize and her captive, and he was about to turn into the mesquites, to make a detour around Castro, leaving the latter for a time, before returning to hang him for his crime, when his heart sprung to his throat, at the sounds and sights that were now before him.

First, there was a crashing of bushes, directly at the point where the horse was feeding, with Castro helplessly bound upon its back, and then, with a wild snort, the mustang of Luny Lize burst in a terrific plunge from the mesquites, and as the madwoman, with Don Martinez in her arms, broke clear of the bushes, she gave out another of her wild yells of triumph!

At the crashing of the brush, the horse of the outlaw threw up his head quickly, and then, as the poor insane creature burst into view and gave that piercing shriek, the terrified horse sprung about, with a loud snort, whirling upon its hind hoofs, and thus causing the treacherous bank to give way. The animal slid back and downward, its forefeet only being upon firm ground, and these limbs trembling with weakness and terror. Only the head, neck, and forelegs of the doomed steed were now to be seen; and, beyond the same, the head of Lorenzo Castro, his features expressing the most abject terror.

Pale as death itself was the Mexican, his lips

trembling and of ashen hue—a sight that was fearful indeed to look upon!

It was but for a moment, however, that this sight remained; to torture the young Texan. Even Luny Lize gazed with a fixed stare of strange and mingled emotions. Then, the strength of the poor horse gave out, and a mingled shriek from man and beast cut the air—a shriek that would ring in the ears of the hearer while life was given him.

A sounding splash afar down, a hundred feet below; a spattering of many waters, a fall of broken earth, and then all was still. Lorenzo Castro had gone to meet his Maker!

Frontier Frank was sick with horror. Cold chills ran to his very marrow, and he had only sense enough remaining to rein back his horse, out of the sight of Luny Lize; then he slipped to the earth, and tearing the cool grass from the sod, pressed it to his heated brow. Strong man that he was, his lungs fed by prairie and mountain air since a youth, inured to hardships, and familiar with scenes of blood in savage warfare, still he was only human. He was not made of iron, to be racked, heart, soul and brain, each half hour, by some dread and horrible scene.

He dared not now attempt the rescue of Don Miguel. He dared not show himself; for he knew that, being now on her last trail, and carrying out the last of her oath of vengeance, she would, upon the sight of any one whom she thought likely to attempt the release of her captive, urge her mustang over the dizzy height, and end her vengeance with her own life, as well as that of Don Miguel Martinez!

He felt positive of this, and hence his inaction.

Often had he heard Luny Lize assert that when she had fully carried out her plans of revenge, ending all by torturing the Serpent of El Paso, she would then die, for there would be nothing left for which she cared longer to live.

Frank knew not the length of time he lay upon the sward. At last he slowly got upon his hands and knees, and crept to the verge of the bend of bushes which concealed him from the river, and looked down on the scene of the recent tragedy.

Luny Lize had disappeared. Not a living object met his view. An irresistible impulse, or fascination, caused him to crawl across the clear space, and lie flat upon the sward, gazing down upon the waters that had engulfed the cowardly abductor of poor Dolores. As the scout reached the bank, there appeared the form of an Apache brave, in a crouching posture, the long scalping-knife in his hand, and his black eyes glittering with a thirst for blood.

At the very point at which the scout had, but the moment previous, been in an almost helpless position, his arms in his belt, the Apache now appeared; and as Frank lay, peering down upon the dark, slow-moving waters of the Rio Grande, the Indian stepped stealthily from the mesquites toward his hated Texan foe.

But the noble steed that had escaped the eye of the savage, in the intense satisfaction of the latter at his prospects of gaining a scalp and weapons, tossed up his head, and gave a snort of alarm.

In an instant the scout was upon his feet, his knife in his hand, and the Apache had cleared but two-thirds the distance, both standing out fair in the moonlight on level ground, and Frank not more than five feet from the terrible chasm.

Both straightened up and gazed into each other's eyes. Both were strong, supple, wiry, and symmetrically formed. Each was filled with hatred most intense for the other.

One or the other, perhaps both, must fly through the air and down into the dark waters of the Rio Grande, to keep company with Lorenzo Castro.

At first Frank had thought the Indian to be Muchacho del Noche; but a second glance proved that his unexpected enemy was an athlete of twice the age of the unfortunate son of Don Martinez—in fact, a brave who had evidently been inured to many years of savage war.

Face to face, without a flinch in either, each sprung forward to deadly conflict, the scout's arm nerved by the thought that suffering ones needed his immediate service and protection, and he had grown desperate from the harrowing experiences of the past night, through all of which his knife had remained unstained, except with the blood of an alligator.

There was no resisting the terrible onslaught of Frontier Frank, and although the brave probably now regretted having been drawn into a hand-to-hand conflict with such a man, still he could not retreat. He therefore entered into the fight, nerved by the consciousness that were he successful in gaining the scalp of the burly Texan, he could henceforth wear an eagle-feather in his head-dress.

For a moment only was there a lightning-like play of steel, that glittered and glinted in the moonlight, then the knife of the savage flew from his hand, his fingers being severed, the blood spurted from his neck, and following quick as a flash of light, the bright steel was buried to the hilt in the Indian's paint-daubed

breast. Jerking his bowie free, Frank now grasped the brave by the belt and the hair, and with herculean strength hurled his vanquished foe far out over the awful chasm; but as the warrior left the scout's grasp he gathered all his remaining strength, and his life went out in a horrible death-yell, that echoed in that dread chasm, as the Indian shot down the terrible height and into the dark waters.

The next moment from down the river rung the Apache yell of vengeance from a hundred maddened throats, and Frontier Frank sprung upon his noble black, and spurred for life up the bank of the Rio Grande, and among the densest of the mesquites!

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIDE BY SIDE.

When Frontier Frank heard the terrible whoop which he knew proceeded from a large war-party of Apaches, he began to realize that the horrors he had passed were as nothing to those which were to come.

He knew that he was in great danger, and his object now was to secrete his horse, and then ascertain the number of the enemy, and, if they were not encamped, the direction they were traveling.

Upon reaching a dense and seemingly impenetrable thicket, the scout gave a peculiar twitch to his bridle-rein, and parting the branches, he passed the leafy screen, followed by his intelligent horse, the animal holding its head low to the earth, in order to wedge its way onward.

Soon a small circular opening was reached, entirely surrounded by a dense and wide thicket of thorns and cacti, through which it would be difficult for even a rat to have made its way, except at the point where Frank had entered; and this could not have been discovered, except by accident, or the most careful search.

This opening, so well guarded, was well known to the scout, as the reader may have inferred.

Patting his noble steed, with a low word of farewell, the animal, although very anxious to feed, refraining from doing so, Frank dashed through the branches. He was now about to try and accomplish a feat which few prairie men even care to attempt; and that was to make his way into the near vicinity of the Apache camp, or halting-place, whichever it might be. The attempt was a very hazardous one, and especially so at this time, for Frank had slain a brave, who had given a far-sounding death-yell.

This yell had told the Apache horde that one of their number had been slain, and proved to them that an enemy was in their near vicinity, and would cause the best scouts to spread and examine all points, to ascertain where the deed had been committed, and who had done the killing. No more skillful trailers, as Frank well knew, can be found among all the Indian tribes of America than the Apaches.

However, the scout had, time and again, made more hazardous attempts than the one he had now resolved upon and been successful.

He knew that the yells proceeded from a point just clear of the mesquites, directly at the ford, and but a rifle-shot from where the many exciting and soul-harrowing events of the night had occurred; and he was positive, as he crawled from thicket to thicket, that there was an understanding between Muchacho del Noche and the chief of this war-party—that the former would, upon this night, meet him and his braves at the ford, and guide them upon a raid into Mexico. Of this, Frank had no doubt, and now it flashed upon his mind that Rancho del Laguna was doomed, if he did not reach there in advance of the Apaches, and put the place in a condition of defense.

The scout was now filled with the greatest apprehension and alarm, to such an extent indeed that Don Miguel and Dolores in their peril were for the time forgotten. But then the latter was soon to be brought to the mind of Frank, in a most striking manner. He knew well every branch and gully in the vicinity of the ford, some of the latter being entirely arched by bushes, which was a great advantage to him in his present most perilous undertaking.

After a long, winding and laborious crawl, Frank at length reached the spot where he had witnessed the terrible tableau; when Muchacho del Noche was about to bury his knife in the heart of poor Dolores. He could now distinctly hear the guttural voices of the Apaches, and the stamping hoofs of many mustangs, and, five minutes after, he was lying outstretched, gazing upon a scene that would have appalled the stoutest heart.

Between the bank of the river at the ford, and above the same for some distance, was a long space that was clear of bush or shrub, and this was entirely filled with wild-eyed mustangs, fully caparisoned for the trail, and their savage, war-painted masters, fierce, hideous Apaches.

The scout at once saw that it was only a halt; that the war-party were not going to encamp, and this filled him with deep concern until he

realized that it was the early morning hour, and that it would be impossible for them to attack Rancho del Laguna until the following night. Feeling greatly relieved, Frank now took a more searching and leisurely survey of the dread and most forbidding assemblage.

Every mustang was held by the jaw-strap, some braves having two in hand, which showed that a number of them must have gone out in search of himself. Next, he perceived a sight which almost caused him to groan aloud. This was Dolores, mounted upon a mustang, and by her side, also mounted, were Muchacho del Noche, and a chief with three eagle-feathers in his fillet, whom Frank at once recognized as old Cochise, the most merciless foe to the whites that ever lived, except perhaps Lone Wolf. Frank knew that the totem on the arm of Dolores had saved her life, but he saw no way open for her rescue.

That old Cochise intended to attack Rancho del Laguna, Frank had not the slightest doubt; and, in the event of a fight, he feared that Muchacho del Noche would be killed while battling against his own home.

Dolores was at such a distance that the scout could not see her face, but he felt that she must know how hopeless her condition was; that there was nothing upon which she could hang the slightest hope of being rescued. The outlook was, indeed, gloomy and terrible, from whichever way the scout attempted to view it. His plan of years was growing more and more difficult of accomplishment, and death and destruction hovered in a dark and dense cloud over Rancho del Laguna.

He could see nothing anywhere of Luny Lize and Don Martinez, and he feared that the latter was indeed being tortured to death.

Luny Lize must have heard the war-whoop of the Apaches, and she well knew its import. She must be aware also, Frank argued, of the presence of Muchacho with the war-party, and that possibly it might have been him that was slain. It was evident, for some reason, that she now wished to avoid the Indians. One thing alone was absolutely certain to Frank, and that was, that the madwoman had taken Don Miguel to some hiding-place, where she would leave him secure, then crawl in and steal a wandering mustang from the extras of the Apaches, and fly to the mountains with her captive, whom she would then, if he were not a corpse already, put to the torture. Certainly Don Miguel had gone through enough of terror and suffering to kill him.

But there was work ahead, and the scout banished Luny Lize and Don Martinez, for the present, entirely from his thoughts.

Rancho del Laguna must be saved.

Dolores was safe from death, and must remain as she was till something definite could be effected. This Frank must somehow arrange.

And now there came a yell from old Cochise, calling his scouts, who came in from all directions, one only among them advancing to report. The moon's rays aslant could have shown him no trail, even though he had seen the blood on the grass.

Muchacho del Noche watched the brave as he reported, and Frank felt sure that the savage youth was gratified in his mind that no capture had been made. Now came a sounding signal, and every brave led his mustang forward, forming two long lines, two deep, and leaving a wide space between.

Two warriors advanced and held the snorting and impatient steeds of Muchacho and old Cochise; two others guarded Dolores, while two led the former down to the lower end of the open space. Old Cochise gave a few guttural orders, and two braves stepped out in front, within thirty paces of Muchacho del Noche, with drawn bows and arrows fitted.

Frontier Frank was amazed, fearing that Muchacho had forfeited his life through having broken some law of the tribe; but his mind was soon relieved. A brave advanced with a beaded fillet, such as are worn by young warriors after their first war-path, and placed it lightly upon the head of Muchacho, who stood like a statue, his arms folded, and his eagle eyes gazing fixedly before him. Old Cochise gave a swing of his lance, and the two warriors in an instant brought up their bows.

The strings twanged, the arrows flew like lightning, and the fillet fell far in the rear of Muchacho, the upper edge pierced by the arrows.

Then, in like manner, was a fillet containing an eagle feather, and one containing two eagle-feathers, shot from the head of the youth of the alligator totem; after which old Cochise advanced with a fillet of exquisite silver filagree work, containing three eagle-feathers, like his own, and with his own hand placed it on the head of Muchacho del Noche, at the same time taking the hand of the latter, and placing it against his paint-daubed breast.

This ended the ceremony. The son of Don Miguel Martinez had thus, at one jump, been made an Apache chief. A loud guttural murmur of satisfaction ran through the lines; then came a yell, and every brave sprang to his saddle, the Apache horde galloping like fiends of the night, down into the Rio Grande, to cross

over to Mexico—poor Dolores in their midst, and Frontier Frank watching it all from his lone lair in the chaparral!

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

FRONTIER FRANK, though full of deep thoughts on the now complicated state of things, felt that the time for action could not be delayed.

He arose, and passed along the gully, giving but a passing glance at the spot where Lorenzo Castro had been secured. It had just occurred to him that, from the fact that Castro had stolen the horse of the young army officer, that the latter would be likely to start forth with on the trail, with a detail of men for the purpose of recovering the animal, which was a very valuable one, and to hang the thief, even if to catch him, they were forced to cross the Rio Grande.

Not only would this be an incentive for the pursuit, but the abduction of Dolores would madden the people of Franklin. Much elated at having thought of this most probable assistance, the scout immediately cut and trimmed a sapling, which he sharpened, and then proceeded at once to the open plain. Here, procuring a pencil and paper from his bullet-pouch, he wrote as follows:

"Moon at full (cannot tell day or date.)

LIEUT. MORSE, Co. B, 2d Cavalry, U. S. A., or any white man who may find this:

"Lorenzo Castro and the horse he stole from the above officer, in or near Franklin are both dead, but Dolores, the belle of Franklin, whom Castro abducted, is a captive to a war-party of Apaches under old Cochise. They have crossed the Rio Grande, and I am positive will attack Rancho del Laguna, at Laguna de los Patos, to-morrow night. For the love of Heaven, ride fast, and rescue Dolores. The Apaches are about a hundred strong.

"FRONTIER FRANK, the Scout."

Securing this note in one corner of a red kerchief, Frank tied the opposite corner to the top of the pole, and then thrust the sharpened end into the prairie sward. This done, his face brightened, and striding hastily back to the chaparral, he proceeded to the thicket where he had left his horse. Regaining his rifle, he led the animal into the clear ground, mounted and rode directly to the ford, where he crossed and went slowly along the opposite bank down the river. Far away to the south he could see the galloping horde of Apaches.

If Lieutenant Morse did follow Castro and should find the scout's directions, there would be lively times at Rancho del Laguna. But would Muchacho del Noche live through the battle? And would it be possible to rescue Dolores? These were questions which Frank could but agonize over.

The boys of the Second Cavalry who went in pursuit of Lorenzo Castro, for the purpose of rescuing Dolores, as has been recorded, returned to Franklin with horses well-blown from their gallop and reported their inability to come up with the scoundrel.

By this time Lieutenant Morse had been well cared for by the surgeon of the regiment, and had returned to camp; but no sooner did the unsuccessful detail report, than he determined to hunt the outlaw to his death, if he was forced to scour the Montezuma country to find him.

It did not seem probable that Castro would remain in Texas after the crimes he had committed, and it was reasonable to suppose that he would strike for the ford below Fort Quitman, and then cross the river.

Lieutenant Morse secured an order from his commanding officer for a detail of twenty-five men, it being deemed unsafe to proceed with a less number when it seemed probable that they would be forced to cross the Bravo.

Although it was contrary to the advice of the surgeon, the lieutenant was resolved upon an early start, if his life paid the forfeit; he therefore set out at the head of his men, all having six days' rations at the cantles of their saddles.

A faithful Mexican guide, who knew every foot of land from Franklin to Eagle Pass, and over the plain to Chihuahua, accompanied them; his services, however, being only needed in crossing the Rio Grande. From this they proceeded to Fort Quitman, and thence down to the ford below which the signal left by Frontier Frank was discovered. The contents of the letter filled Morse with both joy and anguish—joy to know that his darling Dolores had escaped from the dastardly Mexican, and anguish at the thought of her being this time a captive among the blood-thirsty Apaches.

The detachment crossed the ford at noon of the day on the morning of which Frontier Frank had left the signal. The Apache trail being soon discovered, Lieutenant Morse would at once have followed the trail, and attacked the camp, even though they outnumbered him four to one, but he knew that the Indians would, if a dash was made to capture Dolores, brain their captive at once.

The only course to take, was to pass up the river until a point was reached, where they would not be observed by the Apaches, and thence proceed across the plain to Laguna de

los Patos, where they could arrive by night-fall, without in the least injuring their animals.

This decision was acted upon. After the animals were rested, the start was made for Laguna de los Patos; and we must leave the gallant boys of the Second Cavalry, as they pass over the hot plains of Mexico, their faces filled with a fixed determination that they would defeat the plans of Old Cochise, and rescue Dolores, the Belle of Franklin.

When Luny Lize broke from the chaparral, and saw Lorenzo Castro, she at first feared that he might attempt to rescue Don Martinez; but a moment later, she saw that he was himself doomed to a terrible death, a death that appalled even the poor crazed being who beheld it. No sooner had the Mexican and his horse disappeared in the terrible chasm, than she turned her mustang and dashed along the river-side, by the edge of the mesquites, for some distance; but it was not of long continuance, for the poor beast was completely broken down.

She then turned, and again spoke to her captive:

"Capitan Martinez, you were a very bad man to leave Elizabeth as you did. You were, and are the most miserable, contemptible coward that ever defiled God's footstool! You little thought, I dare say, that the poor girl you had drugged and ruined would one day cause you to struggle in a stormy sea of misery through the remainder of your life. You little thought that the babe, your child and hers, would be reared by yourself in luxury, and your daughter, born in wedlock, and for whom I had exchanged mine, would be cared for by poor Luny Lize."

"Yet it was, and is so—Marietta Martinez is my child and yours! And then, your promising son, the heir to Rancho del Laguna—you did not intend him to be reared by old Cochise."

At this very moment, as if her words had conjured up the savage of whom she spoke, the still night air rung with the whoops of a hundred Apaches, and poor Don Miguel, weakened by horror, privation and mental anguish, really wished that the Apaches would capture himself and the maniac woman who held him fast while she upbraided him.

Partially prepared though he was for the terrible revelations she had made, still he had hugged doubts to his bosom; and the fearful truth now tore his already lacerated heart, rendering him probably the most hopeless of all anguished beings upon earth.

So it was that the yells of the Apaches were rather in consonance with his feelings, and he would have welcomed the savages—have felt relieved to have had the red demons tear him from the still more terrible torturer, who clutched him so tightly, and whose insane, fiery gaze burned into his very soul.

Luny Lize jerked her mustang to a halt, when the wild whoop rung along the Rio Grande.

Well did she know its import; and fearful now that she would be robbed of her long-awaited-for revenge, she again urged her miserably-broken steed on toward the east in order to strike the wooded bottom of Toyah Creek, up which she could travel, screened from view, toward the Apache Mountains.

Perfectly safe from detection was the mad-woman, as the attention of the war-party was directed toward the point whence had proceeded the death-howl of one of their number.

Not far did Luny Lize follow the creek—in deed it was impossible for her to do so, as her mustang could proceed no further. Consequently she halted in a screened open space, divested the poor beast of its equipments, then grasped Don Miguel in her arms, and entering a dense thicket, cast him upon the ground, throwing herself by his side. Then exhaustion of brain and body did its work—the poor, crazed being fell asleep.

Although he had reached the very height of human suffering, the old Castilian could not resist the influence of "tired nature's sweet restorer," and he, too, fell into a slumber.

There, side by side, lay the man and the woman he had wronged so many years ago.

Such was their meeting after so many days.

What would be their parting?

We shall see anon.

Had it been pre-ordained that these two should meet in El Paso, each to be an eternal curse to the other?

Was it pre-ordained that they should again meet at the Toyah ford of the Rio Grande, that the one who had already crushed and tortured the other into the borders of madness, by her own insane revenge, should torture him still further—even to the death?

Who shall say what a casual meeting of two human beings may produce? It is but a slight circumstance oftentimes; a word, or a look, may change our entire aim and life.

We will leave them there—Luny Lize and Don Miguel Martinez. The Serpent of El Paso, who has had his fangs drawn, and the once fair Pride of Fort Davis, the bright and happy Lizzie Ellsworth—leave them, reposing side by side in the chaparrals of Toyah Creek, leave them with the deepest regret in our hearts that they ever met, and with none but the gloomiest apprehensions of what their probable parting will be!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BETROTHAL.

EACH event that occurred from the time of the encounter between Pedro and Francisco, which ended so unfortunately for Celesta, fell heavily upon the household of the Lake Ranch. The carrying off of Don Miguel had paralyzed every one, even the families of the peons up the Rio Carmen; all the particulars of the sad affair having been soon after told from one to another.

None except Francisco knew of the dastardly attempt that Pedro had made to abduct Marietta. Francisco had, when he shot Pedro, staggered back to the patio, and ordered the portero to follow him, and carry his young mistress to the casa; he himself being so weak from loss of blood, as to be barely able to walk, and that with great difficulty.

Bidding the old peon to keep silence in regard to what he had seen, Francisco followed on, while the portero carried Marietta into the casa, laying her in a room in the wing opposite to that in which was Celesta; the latter having already received shocks sufficient to seriously retard her recovery.

Francisco, when alone, within a few paces of the couch whereon lay the fair girl who had risked her life for him, began to recall each word and act that had in any way, been associated with himself, originating with Celesta.

He was forced to admit that he had been a blind dot; and, at the same time, the maiden had been so circumspect, had guarded her love so sacredly, that he would probably never have noticed the "trifles light as air" that now, in the retrospect, pointed unmistakably to the truth.

He now knew that it would be impossible for him to love Marietta, and indeed he was very positive that she cared nothing for him.

No, he believed that there was no such feeling as love, for any man, in the heart of Marietta.

As to Celesta, though coy and diffident, she was all love—love to the death—and he, Francisco Martino, was the object of it.

And when he recalled her many virtues, her angelic beauty and grace, her child-like simplicity and melting eyes, that seemed created to be vehicles of the fondest love—when in panoramic array, all her winning ways and charms of body and mind came up before him, the passion which he had once supposed he felt for Marietta seemed to dissolve into nothingness, and the last self-sacrificing act of Celesta, as it came upon the scene, seemed to finish the business, causing to be born, in the heart and soul of Francisco Martino, an honest, true and undying love for Celesta Carasco.

Celesta herself was totally unconscious of the presence so near her, of the caballero for whom she had risked her life. Long time had his image been engraved upon her heart, but she had thought it hidden there, secured from every chance of detection. Now she felt, with bitter shame, that she had betrayed her love to its object, Francisco himself!

But, even with these self-reproaching thoughts a vision glided slowly before her eyes, which however, she could not believe to be real.

It was Francisco in form and face, and every movement; but his face was ghastly as that of a corpse, and his lips parted to cry aloud. Never was there such a sudden transition from the feelings mentioned to heavenly relief. Francisco, for it was he, laid his hand upon hers, knelt upon the floor, and leaning over her, pressed his lips to her brow, while he said:

"Celesta, my darling, Francisco kneels to thank you—to pray *Madre de Dios* to bless you; and to offer you the life that you have saved."

For a time, need we say, both forgot their wounds and the tragic scenes that had, the few previous hours, occurred around Rancho del Laguna.

The old nurse succeeded in reviving Marietta, but the heiress of Rancho del Laguna lay in an unconscious state for some time, her brain being so shocked as to render her incapable of speech or action. During the night, a score of peons guarded the casa, the gates being closed securely, and during all this time Pedro Mercado lay silent and still in the shrubbery without the gates where he had fallen when struck by the bullet from the rifle of Francisco Martino.

The latter had some doubts if Pedro were really dead, and he therefore determined to make a personal inspection some hours later. The result showed that his doubts were well founded; for the moment he entered the bushes, and cast his eyes toward the opening where he had seen Pedro the previous night, and where he had shot him while engaged in his vile attempt, he saw the coward striving to arise to his feet.

Darting forward as fast as his feeble strength would permit, he gave the ruffian a blow on the head with his revolver; then, securing him hand and foot, he called to the old portero, and together they bound him to a tree, Francisco deciding to await the return of the Texan scout and Don Martinez before taking any further action in regard to the fate of the dastardly and perfidious villain.

Upon re-entering the gates, both men were so

horrified at seeing the corpse of the gate-keeper, that they did not give a glance to the plain beyond.

Had they done so, they would have seen a woman, her hair flying behind her, and lashing her horse at headlong speed over the same trail that had been traversed by Frontier Frank the night previous. And this was none other than Marietta, the beautiful heiress of Rancho del Laguna! It was she indeed. Desperate, and apprehensive in regard to her father, and possibly something of the same feeling with reference to Frontier Frank, the impulsive girl was now defying every danger that lay in her way.

On she went, mounted upon a milk-white steed—her favorite, which she had saddled and bridled with her own hands—stealing along by the shore of Laguna de los Patos, unknown to all.

Both Don Martinez and his daughter were gone.

Not one of the Martinez name was left.

But Marietta could not be far away, so the old nurse asserted, when her absence was discovered.

While these things were transpiring, on toward Laguna de los Patos, skimming the prairie on his noble black steed, came Frontier Frank. The sun was now sailing upward, and sending down its withering heat upon the plain. At last, far ahead, the scout sees a white speck, that grows larger and larger as he gallops onward; and he is filled with wonder, knowing that some one is on the plain, and riding toward him.

Not long is it before he knows the rider to be a woman, and when he associates that woman with a milk-white horse, his heart swells, and the blood rushes through his veins with doubly accelerated velocity. He knows that Marietta Martinez is riding to meet him.

She comes for tidings of Don Miguel, her father.

What can he tell her?

The scout shudders from head to foot.

He feels that Don Martinez has met a terrible fate, from which it was impossible to have saved him. He has but one hope. The mustang of Luny Lize was too broken down to travel a mile from the Rio Grande with its double load. And on this slight hope Frank now depends.

He will begin his search for Luny Lize as quickly as the meditated attack of old Cochise is defeated. He is confident of help from Lieutenant Morse, and he has a presentiment that all will yet be well. This braces him up to meet the queen of his heart, but whom he does not dare dream will ever be his.

She comes toward him, a perfect picture of angelic loveliness, her eyes growing brighter, her cheeks flushing, as she nears the man who has, regardless of her proud, haughty nature, humbled her, without attempting to do so.

She has perceived long since that her father is not with the scout, and her pallid face had grown more ghastly; but as she draws near to Frontier Frank, the love that she had never previously so much as dreamed of, rules her whole being. But she crushes it down, crowds filial love to the front, and determines to think only of the missing one.

White and black steeds meet side by side.

Man and maid gaze into each other's eyes, each striving to mask an almost ungovernable love. Frank was the first to speak.

"Senorita, why have you left Rancho del Laguna in such a time of danger?"

"Senor Frank, I come to get tidings of my father. Where is Don Miguel? My brain is bursting. Tell me, where is my poor father?"

"Senorita Martinez, I cannot say. He is in God's hands, as we are ourselves."

"You have not seen him, then?"

"I have seen him."

"And why did you not bring him to me?"

"Because I was prevented from doing so by a war-party of a hundred Apaches."

"*Madre de Dios!*" she exclaimed, in horror.

"And not only did they prevent me, senorita, but I was forced to fly on the wings of the wind, to protect you; for these merciless fiends, murderers, and torturers of women and children, will be at the walls of Rancho del Laguna the coming night!"

"*Dios Grande!*" she said, crossing herself, and gazing prayerfully skyward.

"Come, senorita," he said, "we must on toward the hacienda. There is much to be done to put the place in a condition of defense."

"But my father, Senor Frank?" she began, tearfully.

"I swear to you that I will save Don Martinez, if it is in the power of man to do so, after we have driven back the Apaches from Rancho del Laguna."

"*Gracias a Dios!*" said the beautiful girl, placing her hand in the broad palm of the scout, and looking trustfully into his eyes.

So changed was Marietta since these recent terrible events had transpired, so stricken with anguish at the capture of her father, that the great heart of the brave Texan bled for her. He sprang from his horse, removed his sombrero, and pressed her little hand to his lips,

while his eyes spoke volumes of sympathy born of his love.

And so grateful was the lone and grief-stricken maiden for that sympathy, that her small, fair hand drew his to her, her white steed stepped closer toward him, and her eyes gazed into his so wistfully, so filled with half-love, half-adoration, that Frontier Frank impulsively staked everything upon a single throw, and clasping her waist with his strong arms, while hers were thrown around his neck, like vine about an oak, and her wealth of hair fell forward, mingling with his own, half vailing the faces of both as their lips met in the rapture of a newly-acknowledged love.

And thus, on Mexique prairie, amid the grass and flowers that stretched as far as eye could reach, with naught but the blazing sun to witness their silent betrothal—thus did Frontier Frank and Marietta Martinez confess, each to the other, a love as strong, perchance as unquenchable, as the fiery orb above them.

Thus, eighteen years after he had pleaded in vain for the love of the mother, the love of the daughter came to him, as a reward for all his patience and faith.

His waiting, watching, suffering, and anxiety seemed now far in the distant past, and his weary and torturing ride toward Rancho del Laguna was to live in his memory like a journey through Paradise.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOME AGAIN.

It is midnight of the night that followed the meeting of Frank and Marietta upon the prairie. All has been done that can be done, under the directions of the scout, to put Rancho del Laguna in a condition of defense.

The stock has all been driven to the south side of the Rio Carmen, and is in charge of some of the brave *vaqueros*. The corrals and *jacals* are deserted, for Frank has caused all the peons, women and children included, to come within the walls of the hacienda, not many words having been needed to induce them to do so; in fact, the poor creatures were frantic at the mere mention of the Apaches. And the men were hardly less so; for old Cochise had often swept the surrounding country, leaving a trail of blood and devastation behind him.

Frontier Frank is well aware of the cowardice of these peons. He knows that he cannot depend upon them, when the fierce war-cries of the Apaches ring in their ears; so he has brought the women and children inside, in place of having them flee to Carizal, in order to prevent their husbands and fathers and brothers from running in a mob from the rear gate, at the first appearance of the Indians.

It is a most desperate situation, and, nothing would excuse this placing the women and children in a position of possible danger, but the fact that the scout was confident of help from Lieutenant Morse and his cavalry.

He knew that if he could not hold the walls, they could all then retire within the *casa*, and defend it, the pierced doorways and windows being securely barred with iron. The doors were of strong make, and the walls of the *casa* were three feet in thickness, and project breast high above the roof, in order that when attacked, parties could, with perfect safety, shoot down into the *patio* and gardens upon the foe.

Marietta has now partially thrown off her anguish, and is doing all in her power to maintain order among the affrighted women and children, and to encourage poor Celesta, whose wound, from the constant excitement in which she has been, causes her great pain.

Both Marietta and Celesta have confided their love secrets to each other, and have exchanged felicitations. Francisco, though still weak, is quite on the alert, being second in command of the garrison, he having charge of the defenses next to Laguna de los Patos; but Frank has informed him that he must take full charge of the defense, upon the commencement of the attack, as the scout's intention is to go outside the walls, and make an attempt to rescue poor Dolores, as soon as the Apaches show themselves. The capture of this maiden, and the peril in which she is now placed, had been detailed to all; and in this way Frank prevented Marietta having any possible feeling of jealousy, although she did plead with him not expose his life in such a manner.

Frank first proceeded to a high tree beyond the walls, to the east of the *casa*, where a view of the plain eastward is to be had; and, after scanning the broad expanse through his glass, he soon fixed his eye upon the galloping horde of Apaches.

Quickly he descended, rushed to the landing, sprung into a boat and rowed toward the west, the water curling and flying in white foam from the prows.

Reaching a favorable point, he ascended another tree, and his strong form trembled, for he well knew that the fate of all within the walls of the *casa* depended upon what might meet his eye on the west plain.

If naught should break the level view of the

prairie, then all is lost; a horrible death, or a fate that is far worse awaits them all.

He lifts the glass hesitatingly, almost dreading to gaze through it.

But a moment thus, and then a cry of relief, of thanks immeasurable, burst from his throat—a yell that, if the gallant boys of the Second Cavalry could but have heard it, would have caused them to respond in ringing cheers and dash spurs hard to meet the man from whom it proceeded.

This time Frontier Frank descended the tree in such haste as to endanger life and limb; then springing into the boat, his muscles strained, his bright eyes glittering, it darted through the water like a thing of life. Quickly he ordered a peon to take all the boats to the further side of the Rio Carmen and remain there with them; then, drawing his bowie, he bounded along the outside walls in full view of the amazed inmates, who gazed over the *cacti*, thinking their brave leader had gone insane. One ringing shout, however, explained all to the garrison.

Frank came to a halt in the open moonlight, some fifty paces from the west walls, waved his bowie a moment in the air to draw attention, and then pointed the glittering steel toward the west, as he shouted the welcome, thrice welcome words:

"*Los soldados Americanos!*"

Wild, ringing cries break from *vaqueros*, *buckaros* and the peons generally.

"*Viva los soldados Americanos! Viva el Coronel Frank!*"

Upon the *casa* roof stands Marietta, and, as she sees the scout flourish his knife, she springs upon the breastwork, tears off her *rebozo*, and waves it in gladness and admiration, while Francisco, by her side, cuts circles in the air with his sword.

Then, as the scout raised his hands, pointing to the east, and circling his bowie about his head, in imitation of scalping, all faces became pallid as death itself, for the rumble of hoofs now struck their ears.

The Apaches were coming in full force!

Would the brave cavalry boys arrive in time?

The scene instantly changed. Not a face is to be seen above the *cacti*-guarded walls of Rancho del Laguna, and Frank too has disappeared.

Beyond the ribbon of trees that shuts out the west plain from view is a most fearful sight.

Like a tornado come the wild-eyed mustangs, whisking through the prairie grass, with their painted Apache riders too hideous almost to be of earth.

Afar behind flies their long hair, and the hair torn from tortured heads that decorates their shields and lance points. Bending forward in their saddles, their snake-like eyes striving to pierce the screen of trees, and gaze upon the walls that hold their expected victims, their quirts hissing through the air and cutting their steeds unmercifully, that with snort and plunge fly over the plain—on they come, murder their trade, torture their joy, the shrieks of murdered women and babes the sweetest music in their ears. A hundred fiends, thirsting for innocent blood, carrying death, desolation, and despair wherever they ride.

And in their midst rides poor Dolores, her face death-like, and an expression of mingled horror and hopeless despair frozen upon it.

She is not bound, however. A lariat attached to the neck of her mustang, and held by an Indian who rides alongside, is all that shows she is a captive.

At the head of this most savage horde rides the chief, old Cochise, and by his side Muchacho del Noche, the latter eagerly scanning the woods ahead, the wild war spirit shown strong in his painted face. Proudly is poised his head, upon which rests the silver fillet which flaunts the three eagle-feathers of a chief.

As they arrive within a rifle-shot of the timber, they draw rein, and proceed slowly and cautiously, two braves being sent ahead to scout the wood, and prevent an ambush. A guttural order from old Cochise, and two other braves ride into the wood to the left toward the Rio Carmen, with Dolores in charge, the main body proceeding toward the gates. Muchacho del Noche dashes on in advance to reconnoiter; but he goes not far, for as he enters the shrubbery, he sees to his surprise and gratification the very man he had swam after in the *laguna*, and who, but for the white scout, would have been the means of losing his life by the alligator—none other than Pedro Mercedo, fast tied to a tree, as Francisco and the old *portero* had bound him some hours before.

Forgetting aught else but his recent defeat by this man, maddened at the thought that one whose scalp he had already, in imagination, thrust into his belt on the *laguna* bank, at his first visit to Laguna de los Patos—furious when he recalled that defeat, Muchacho del Noche sprung to the earth before the appalled Castilian, who gave a wild, piercing yell of fear and horror.

Realizing that the ice was broken, at the same instant that he perceived he had made a mistake in creating an alarm before old Cochise was on hand with his warriors, Muchacho shot out his piercing war cry, plunged his knife into Pedro's heart then tore off the reeking scalp of the

caballero, at the same time severing the bonds that had bound him to the tree, casting the thongs into the thicket, and hurling the quivering and dying man into the middle of the opening, there lying outstretched as though he had met his death in fair fight. All this before his fellow brave came up.

And this very circumstance, so ill timed to the Apaches, as they thought it, warning, as it must have done, the enemy of their approach, was well-timed, for the brave scout, Frontier Frank, who lay in wait amid the trees, at the very point where Pedro had attempted to assassinate Francisco, was witness to it all.

The two braves, who had Dolores in charge, most fortunately for the latter, proceeded directly to the place where the scout stood ready to receive them.

Springing from behind a tree as the Indians dismounted, and at the very instant, that Pedro Mercedo gave his shriek of despair, thus drawing the attention of the two Apaches, Frank clove one of them from throat to thigh with a terrible downward cut, laying open his vitals, and hurling him to the earth. Then his blood-dripping steel was buried in the heart of the other brave, his hand being clapped over the mouth of the Indian, thus preventing a death-yell.

With a glad cry of joy and relief, Dolores sprung into the arms of Frontier Frank, who bounded fast through the bottom to the boat-landing, thence up the walled way to the back gate, which opened at his signal, and closed with a clang, as he and Dolores rushed in.

Darting through the gardens, and across the *patio*, the scout placed Dolores on her feet in the apartment of Celesta, where was also Marietta, the latter being clasped for a moment in the arms of Frank, while the rescued maid cried out in haste, as, panting with exertion, the scout ran back!

"My sister Marietta! Celesta, my sister! I am poor Dolores of Franklin!"

As Frank again rushed out from the *patio*, he grasped his belt of revolvers from the old *portero*, who stood ready with the same, while loud *vivas* filled the air at the sight of the daring scout, who ran back to the front gate, just as the Apache horde charged toward the same, letting fly a volley of arrows at the heads of the peons, who according to directions, were peering over the *cacti*, to draw the fire of the Indians. The Apaches were answered by a hurrying rain of "blue whistlers" from the *escopetas* of the Mexicans; which arm, at such short range did some execution, causing a few death-yells and howls of fury from the braves who had confidently looked for an easy victory.

Never was human being more surprised than was Muchacho del Noche!

It was evident that the people of the hacienda had known of their approach, and had been ready to receive them; and this before they could have been observed from the plain, for the peons from the *jacals* were manning the walls.

As affairs now looked, the first plan, for scalps and plunder, that he had marked out, was likely to prove a failure; and his eagle feathers must droop with the weight of defeat, if something were not now done to gain the advantage over the enemy.

Muchacho was maddened. He was furious, as was old Cochise; but the feelings of the former cannot be described, when he saw the tall form of the Texan scout daringly exposed upon the upper tower of the gateway, rifle in hand, which weapon he was using to great advantage, firing half a dozen shots in rapid succession and springing back into a place of safety as a shower of arrows cut the air where an instant before he had stood.

The superstitious wonder of Muchacho del Noche was at the first great, but it soon vanished. The scout had been in Texas the previous night, and must have guessed the destination of the war-party.

Suddenly the massed Apaches were amazed and thunder-stricken. The enemy were playing strange.

The gates of Rancho del Laguna slowly swung open, but not a human being was in view.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE END OF THE ROPE.

It was no easy matter for old Cochise to keep his braves from urging their mustangs into the gates; for he was too cunning to be led into what he knew to be a trap and from which there would be no escape. He knew well that, had there been none but Mexicans within the walls, the gate would not have been opened; hence his worst suspicions were aroused. These suspicions not only withheld him, but they caused him to order his braves into a more safe position. He then conferred with Muchacho del Noche in regard to the situation. The latter was satisfied that there could be no force within the walls that could cope successfully with their braves, and volunteered to lead the attack if old Cochise would allow him one-half of the warriors.

This, the old chief readily assented to, and the next moment, with nearly fifty braves at his back, Muchacho charged into the gates of his own home. To his surprise, there was not a single human being to be seen. Loud rung the Apache war-cry, but otherwise all was silent. This, however, was of but short continuance. Suddenly the gates closed with a loud clang, a huge bar of iron slipping from one tower to the other, and at the same moment a rattling discharge of carbines mingled with the shouts of command and the Apache death-yells.

Muchacho del Noche had been outwitted, and he well knew that old Cochise, if the latter escaped, would be furious at having been led into such a scrape. The young chief raged and tore about, eager to do some desperate deed; but there was no such thing as forcing open the gate, and he and his braves dashed about in their fury like caged panthers.

So much were they startled, when they heard the sound of battle, and realized that they had been trapped, that, after the fire of the peons from the roof, they galloped madly among the magnolias; and all this time Frontier Frank was shooting down upon them. Then, at a favorable moment, when there were none near at hand to observe him, he bent downward, grasped the belt of Muchacho del Noche, and jerked the young chief into the tree, stifling the warning yell by quickly thrusting a wad of buckskin into his mouth.

Knowing the desperate nature of his attempt, the scout brought every muscle into use, and rapidly bound Muchacho fast, hand and foot, to the trunk of the tree, some twenty feet from the ground. Just then a sheet of flame came from the rear roof of the *casa*, and many of the braves fell dead from their mustangs, the survivors galloping into the magnolias.

Outside, the din of battle waged fast and furious.

Throughout it all, Frank crouched among the dense branches, having issued his orders for everything that was being done. The volley from the rear of the *casa* roof had been ordered by Francisco, to force the Apaches back under the magnolias, in compliance with these directions.

Gliding from limb to limb, Frontier Frank, at an opportune moment, dropped into the flowering shrubs beneath the tree, crept into the arbor, where still hung the hammocks of Marietta and Celesta, although many of the outer strands of silk were now holding Muchacho del Noche to the tree above. The scout grasped the jaw-strap of a riderless horse, sprung upon its back, and shot like a flash of light toward the gate; the way being now clear of Apaches.

Drawing the bar and pulling the gates open, Frank dashed out before the Indians in the gardens could gallop upon him; the peons on the roof opening fire upon them as soon as they saw the scout gallop around the court.

As Frank urged his stolen horse out from the shrubbery, and got a view of the plain, he gave a loud cry of relief; for the gallant boys of the Second Cavalry were just approaching the hacienda, while over the plain sped a dozen braves, or more, flying for their lives.

The ground near the gates, and beneath the trees, was strewn with dead and dying Apaches; and, through their midst, Frontier Frank rode on to meet the scouting party, knowing that an avalanche of savage fury was behind him.

On came Lieutenant Morse, his face pale and his head bandaged; every sign of suffering upon him.

As he rode up to the scout, he called out in an anxious voice, his whole manner showing what he felt.

"For the love of Heaven, tell me where is Dolores?"

A strange light flashed in Frank's eyes. There could be no mistaking the manner of the lieutenant. He loved Dolores—that was plain—and the scout placed his hand upon the shoulder of Morse, when he reached his side, while he replied:

"Dolores is safe, pard. I rescued her before the fight commenced. Come, boys; now for one last charge! Down with the red devils!"

A rousing cheer rent the air. All saw that the *casa* roof was lined with women and children, among whom were a group of ladies, waving their handkerchiefs. The scout rose in his saddle, and waved his revolvers above his head.

On, without a leader, came the Apaches to death and destruction; for thrice their number could not stand the terrible charge of the "boys in blue." One, two, three—the rattling volleys burst from revolvers, then bright sabers flashed in the silvery moonlight, and a terrible hand to hand conflict ensued. Victory soon crowned the sight. But a remnant of that brutal band of old Cochise, flying, with bated breath and terrified gaze over their shoulders upon the back trail, toward the Rio Grande, told the tale of the attack on Rancho del Laguna!

Great was the joy, as the gallant defenders entered within the walls. The cavalymen encamped opposite the main gateway, and a

grand barbecue was soon being prepared near the bottom timber.

By request of Celesta, who was able to sit, propped up by pillows, the gallant and Frontier Frank, after removing the stains of battle, met Marietta and Dolores in her presence, and the scene was one long to be remembered by each; Francisco, as a matter of course, being present as well.

Frank excused himself, at the first opportunity, and proceeded at once to the garden, climbing up the magnolia, for the purpose of unbinding his captive, and placing him in a more comfortable position.

The scout reached the limb, and found but a few silken cords dangling from the rough bark—all that was left to show that there had been a man bound there. Muchacho del Noche was gone!

All that Frank had planned and accomplished to gain the savage boy, and secure to him his birthright, were as nothing. Utterly discouraged, the scout descended the tree, having ascertained beyond a doubt that the cords had been cut by a wounded brave, who must have observed the capture of the young chief; the drops of blood, upon the limbs and leaves, proving this.

As he had promised Marietta, Frontier Frank now lost no time in starting in search of Don Miguel Martinez; and, as fate ordered it, struck the trail of Muchacho del Noche and the brave who had liberated him, tracing them by blood drops over the rocks. At last, however, he lost the trail and wandered until, eventually guided by wild whoops, he discovered the entrance to the secret retreat of old Cochise, which has already been described. The yells proceeded from the interior, and Frank had but just time to secrete himself among the bowlders, when to his horror, from out the passage came Luny Lize, with Muchacho del Noche, apparently dead, in her arms.

Winding here and there, filling the air with mad and exultant shrieks, went the once beautiful Elizabeth Ellsworth, now the wretched, insane Luny Lize, clasping in her arms, the son of the man who had cursed her whole life!

What dread project she might have in view, the scout could not decide; but he was soon to know, soon to witness a scene more horrible than anything he had yet been called upon to behold. The maniac woman urged her mustang up the scoria-like side of a high peak, which, toward the south, was one sheer precipice, two hundred and fifty feet in height.

Frontier Frank supposed that the woman, whom he had once so fondly loved, intended casting Muchacho over the cliff; but he believed the wretched boy to be dead.

Thus far his thoughts went, and no further. He could not but feel relieved to know that the unfortunate youth was dead, for it was far better thus; but he would fain secure him Christian burial, although he feared to call out to Luny Lize, for the mustang, in the event of his rider becoming any more excited, might make a mis-step on that narrow and dangerous path.

Muchacho del Noche had returned to the retreat of old Cochise; there, maddened at the loss of their braves through him—his white skin going far to make them believe him to have been a traitor—the squaws had secured him to a stake, and thrown hatchets at him, until Luny Lize had come to the rescue. This much the scout already suspected; but, while he thus reasoned the madwoman reached a shelf that led directly to the dizzy precipice, where, giving a piercing yell, she thrust her knife into the ham of her horse. The brute sprung madly forward. Luny Lize, having torn a kerchief from her neck, cast it around the eyes of the animal, where it was held in place by the wind of their speed. Just then the scout saw the arms of the youth tossed wildly about and he knew that he was alive. The next moment, there came another terrific shriek, and Frontier Frank's blood ran cold, his heart ceased beating, for afar out from the rocky shelf, over the dizzy height, sprung the mustang, with Luny Lize and Muchacho del Noche shooting down through that awful space!

At last the poor demented creature's revenge and life had ended. Fearing that after her death the youth might in some way be returned to his home, and thus the accursed name of Martinez be preserved, she had thus taken the lost heir of Rancho del Laguna with her on the "long dark trail."

Throwing off his sickening horror, the scout darted up to the entrance, and discovering the slow-swinging string of skulls he bounded over the sheet of water, when the strange legends on the rocks met his eye:

"Paso Inferno!"
"Carmeno del Muerto!"

As he read the inscription a heavy groan fell upon his ear. Drawing his revolver as he turned, Frank saw a sight that filled him with sympathetic anguish, and yet with relief.

Bound fast to a small basaltic column, his feet near the water, his eyes fixed upon the same with a terrible longing, his lips parched and cracked, was Don Miguel Martinez. The scout knew at a glance that Luny Lize had condemned

her betrayer to death from hunger and thirst; the latter being rendered ten-fold more torturing and agonizing by the sight of the sheet of limpid water flowing before his eyes.

Drawing his bowie, Frank cut Don Martinez loose, and grasping the old man in his arms, ran out under the festoon of skulls, and down into and across the crater, quickly leaving the peak-bound cavern of death behind him.

The scout bore Don Miguel to the cabin that he had built for Luny Lize, and there nursed him back to a better state of health and strength; at which time they held a consultation, Frank revealing the whole secret of the alligator totem, but one-half of which had been told the old Castilian by Padre Jose.

When Don Miguel had been informed of the death of Lizzie Ellsworth, he was greatly relieved; and scarcely less so in regard to the demise of his Apache-reared son. He now readily entered into a compact to will his fortune equally between Marietta, Dolores, and Celesta, at the request of the scout. He was eager now to return to Rancho del Laguna, and his regard for Frontier Frank, who had again at the last moment saved his life, was approaching to adoration.

Great was the joy at Rancho del Laguna when the scout and Don Martinez returned.

Lieutenant Morse had reported at Fort Quitman, and there met his commanding officer, who gave him leave of absence. He, too, put in an appearance, serving to fill the party.

We need only say, that in thirty days after the recovery of Don Miguel Martinez, there was a triple wedding at Rancho del Laguna—Frontier Frank, or, as he now proved to be, Frank Farnsworth, of Galveston, Texas, and Marietta Martinez; Francisco Martino and Celesta Carasco; and Lieut. Edward Morse and Dolores Martinez, the latter having insisted on retaining the name given her by poor Elizabeth Ellsworth. The secret of the totem remained still a secret, except to Frank, Don Miguel, and Padre Jose.

The scout interested himself more in the mines he had discovered, and soon became rich, refusing to profit by his marriage with Marietta.

Francisco and Celesta shared the *casa* with Frank and Marietta, and together they strove to make the declining years of Don Miguel happy.

If he had sinned, he had also suffered.

Lieutenant Morse left the army and settled in Franklin, where he now resides with his beautiful wife, Dolores. Children flock around their board, and Don Martinez has given his daughter a dowry of a very large sum, with extensive herds; all of which greatly surprised her and her husband, she not dreaming that the old Castilian is her father.

Frontier Frank buried Elizabeth Ellsworth and Muchacho del Noche near the little cabin, in the secret opening in the vicinity of Wild Rose Pass.

This he accomplished at great risk; and often after did he lead the van in fierce fights with old Cochise, breaking up the stronghold of the latter, and waging war against Lone Wolf, while he guided the Texan Rangers over bloody trails in

APACHERIA.

THE END.

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